SUFI - RAMAKRISHNA STUDY SERIES VII (CONCLUDING REMARKS)

A General Comprehension of The Sufi & Ramakrishna Movement

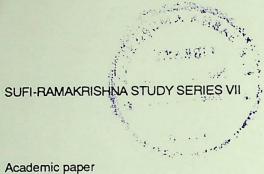


By Ananda Contained to

Sufi - Ramakrishna Study Series VII (Concluding Remarks)

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By Ananda



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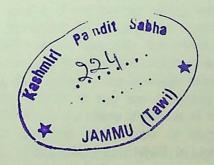
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May the Mother of the universe, whose activity knows no pause - incessantly distributing the fruits of actions done, guiding unceasingly all actions yet to come - bestow Her boon of blessing on me, Her child for ever more. I realise. I know, that it is She who holds the ropes of Karma in Her hands.

Swami Vivekananda: Ambastotra, 2







FOREWORD

was asked by 'ANANDA' the author of SUFI-RAMAKRISHNA Series to write a conclusion which will also act as a Foreword since this will be the concluding part of the series.

On deep thought I remembered reading the following portion in the Book titled 'LIVING SUFISM' by Seyyed Hossein Nasr which in my opinion is worthy for reproduction:

"It is this gnosis which stands as the best proof of the truth of religion as such because the gnostic sees religion as an inseparable aspect of human existence. There is no better proof of the existence of God than man, who confirms his creator through his theomorphic nature and particularly through his intelligence which stands as the proof of the Absolute that is the real object:

Human nature in general and human intelligence in particular cannot be understood apart from the phenomenon of religion, which characterizes them in the most direct and most complete way possible. If we can grasp the transcendent nature (not the psychological nature) of the human being, we thereby grasp the nature of revelation of religion, of tradition: we understand their possibility, their necessity, their truth. And in understanding religion, not only in a particular form or according to some verbal specification, but also in its formless essence, we understand the religions, that is to say the meaning of their plurality and their diversity: this is the plane of gnosis, of the religio parennis, whereon the extrinsic antinomies of dogma are explained and resolved...." (RELIGIO PERENNIS, in Light on the Ancient Worlds by F. Schuon, page 142)

And this religio perennis is nothing but the core of any religion - the universal spirit and the unity between all the

religions. Countless are the times when Sri Ramakrishna has spoken on this aspect of religion. For instance the words uttered by him long ago are so apt today in our country for he said: "The attitude that my religion alone is right and all other religions are false is not good. I see that God Himself has become all these men, images, and salagram. I see one alone in all these; I do not see two. I see only one." The Master (Ramakrishna) was always in favour of striking a balance which will be acceptable to all and such a balance according to him was: "...but I say that we are all calling on the same God. Jealousy and malice need not be. Some say that God is formless, and some that God has form. I say, let one man meditate on God with form, if he believes in form, and let another meditate on the formless. What I mean is that dogmatism is not good. It is not good to feel that my religion alone is true and other religions are false. The correct attitude is this: My religion is right: but I do not know whether other religions are right or wrong, true or false. I say this because one cannot know the true nature of God unless one realizes HIM. Kabir used to say: 'God with form is my Mother, the Formless is my Father. Which shall I blame? Which shall I praise? The two pans of the scales are equally heavy'. So relevant are the following words which are worthy of being inscribed in gold: "I see people who talk about religion constantly quarrelling with one another. Hindus, Mussalmans, Brahmos, Saktas, Vaishanavas, Saivas, all quarrel with one another. They haven't the intelligence to understand that He who is called Krishna is also Siva and the Primal Sakti, and that is HE, again who is called Jesus and Allah. There is only one God and He has thousand names."

Sufism is characteristic of this type of universal outlook. It happens to be the only liberal Islamic group emphasizing Bhakti in the same Sattwic manner as Sri Ramakrishna. I must congratulate and thank 'ANANDA', the author of the series for the

exposition of this concept of universality of religion contained in Sufism and the wisdom of Sri Ramakrishna. The author's aim has been to detail and elaborate it in a comparative manner as far as possible always veering towards the attainment of a harmonious and universal understanding of religion in its broadest spectrum and I think he has succeeded in it.

Let me conclude this short foreword by quoting what Tarjuman al- ashwaq said and what Sri Ramakrishna sang:-

"My heart has become capable of every form: it is a pasture for gezelles and a convent for Christians And a temple for idols and the piligrim's Ka'ba and the table of the Torah, and the Book of the Koran, I follow the religion of Love: whatever way Love's camels take, that is my religion and my faith."

(A Sufi Poem).

"I have joined my heart to Thee: all that exists are Thou, Thee only have I found, for Thou art all that exists O Lord, Beloved of my heart! Thou art the Home of all, Where indeed is the heart in which Thou dost not dwell? Thou hast entered every heart: all that exists are Thou, Whether sage or fool, whether Hindu or Mussalman, Thou, makest them as Thou wilt: all that exists art Thou, Thy presence is everywhere, whether in heaven or in Kaaba Before Thee all must bow, for Thou art all that exists.

(a song much loved by Sri Ramakrishna)

SUFI MOVEMENT : Its Structure And Organisation In General ,Compared With Ramakrishna Movement

- By ANANDA

In one of our previous editions we had discussed about the 'pathway to God' - SUFI style! No doubt it was a very general treatment detailing cursorily some ideas of the journey to spiritual life as laid down in Sufism. As such there was nothing specific, no particularization of methods and values in that treatise. From this general discussion let us now trace the Sufi pattern of life - the particulars of different patterns and methods developed during the course of its history. We have undertaken this task with the sincere hope that it will be not only interesting but will be knowledgeable and give us some more depth and dimension so to say about it.

To begin from its origin, it is well to refer to A.J. Arberry who states: "The mystical movement in Islam sprang, out of asceticism and was represented in its earliest phase by the personalities of individual men and women who whether in town or desert - but especially in desert - devoted themselves singly and exclusively to the service of God and joyous experience of His grace. This period was followed by an age in which theory went hand in hand with practice and famous Shaikhs, themselves holy men taught the nascent doctrine of Sufism to disciples, either solitary or in groups." (SUFISM - An Account of Mystics of Islam/George Allen & Unwin: Page 84)

The same holds in Hinduism also. Swami Saradananda in his famous book 'SRI RAMAKRISHNA THE GREAT MASTER' says: "That the religion of India is founded on God-vision becomes

clear, when we reflect upon the significance of words and expressions such as *Rishi* (seer), *Apta* (one who has attained the goal of life), *Adhikarika* (One possessed of authority), *Prakriti-lina Purusha* (a person merged in the cause of the universe) and the like. These names have been used since Vedic times to describe the teachers who came to re-establish religion. It is beyond doubt that such men were designated by these names because they had given proof of their unique power, acquired as a result of direct knowledge of the reality beyond the senses. This statement holds good in the case of every one of them, from the Rishis of the Vedic period to the divine incarnations of the Puranic (Epic) Age" (page 6)

Yes! From the life and personalities of great spiritual persons only religious beliefs are formed and as such there is nothing strange in the case of Sufis also. However it is claimed that Vedic religion is an exception since it is said to be spontaneous, objective, natural, timeless and impersonal. This Vedic outlook although ahistorical, may look superficial on the surface; however one has to admit that it is infact closer to modern psycho-social and anthropological view of religion, emphasising the existence of a strong foundation and background of faith at all times and stages: this was so even before the appearance of such personal architects of various religions whose attempts were limited to the propagation of modified and reformed types as manifested in the course of history. But these personal sources are merely secondary in nature and can never have that natural or spontaneous group character of any faith.

Growth of religion makes a journey at a particular point of time in history usually through and through the character and experiences of a great prophet or a leader. Swami Vivekananda says: "... we find one consensus of opinion, that the truths they teach are the results of the experiences of particular persons

Thus it is clear that all the religions of the world have been built upon that one universal and adamantine foundation of all our knowledge - direct experience. The teachers all saw God: they all saw their own souls, they saw their future, they saw their eternity and what they saw they preached ..." (The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. 1 page 126) Similarly, like all other religions possibly Sufism too had a natural beginning beyond all time and source somewhere in the human mind. How in course of time it was organized and took a formal shape gradually is described by Arberry thus: "The Persian theorist Hujwiri writing in the 5th/11th century, enumerates several schools of mysticism which transmitted the teachings of the Masters." Like in the Upanishadic tradition, "The relation of teacher and pupil, familiar in other disciplines presently developed into the characteristic Sufi counterpart of elder (Shaikh and Pir) and disciple (murid, shagrid) and convents (ribat, khanqah) were founded and endowed where a celebrated saint would reside with a group of his followers, who studied under him and worshipped with him for a shorter or longer period."

In this connection we have to note how these Sufi institutions centered round the notions of life and character. In this respect they were similar to other historic spiritual communities gathering around some saints and leaders in search of spirituality: interestingly enough these early institutions are never that theoretic or doctrinal in the beginning. Max Weber without bothering to go deep tries to classify these groups which gave more importance to life and character as merely charismatic. But in reality it was not charismatic alone since love, respect for life and virtue play a great role in the crystallisation of the future faiths and religions. Naturally character and personalities act as effective catalysts and this characterization of any religious

organisation and faith with life is very noteworthy in most of the religions - ancient as well as modern.

One can as well go so far as to say that this fact of character and life is also another evidence of the anthropocentric tendency in man and his religion, and which slowly emerges out of its tribal nature with the passing of time and circumstances. Sufism is no exception to this and Bukhari Riquq is quoted by many for saying that: "Nothing is more pleasing to Me, as a means for My slave to draw near unto Me, than worship which I have made binding upon him; and my slave ceaseth not to draw near unto Me with added devotions of his free-will until I love him; and when I love him, I am the Hearing wherewith he heareth and the Sight wherewith he seeth and the Hand whereby he graspeth and the Foot whereon he walketh."

In Gita also Lord Krishna tells Arjuna on the battlefield "I am the Self, O Gudakesa, seated in the hearts of all beings. I am the beginning, the middle and also the end of all beings. And whatever is the seed of all beings, that am I, O Arjuna. There is no being, whether moving or unmoving that can exist without Me. (Gita Chap. 10, Solkas 20 and 39) Sri Ramakrishna used to say "A lamp cannot burn without oil. Even so, man cannot be bereft of God. The relationship between Iswara and Jivatman is like that between magnet and iron."

In such psychological reflections as above not only the anthropocentric, a shadow of the individual and the group mind but even the cosmic mind is vividly picturised no doubt. Hindu scriptures abound in such parallels of reflections specially in the Vedic and Upanishadic tradition, including Purusha Sukta. These are the stages basic to our human philosophy before it acquires its doctrinal nature and theological denominations. Martin Ling referring to the above-mentioned passage by Bukhari Riquq further states that: "The whole of Sufism - its aspirations, its

practice and in a sense also even its doctrine - is summed up in this Holy Tradition, which is quoted by the Sufis perhaps more often than any other text apart from the Quran." (What is Sufism. Page 74)

Apart from "the obligations of Islam, often known as the Five Pillars (SHAHADAH meaning roughly that none is worshipable but God) - five times prayer a day, initiation into Sufi mysteries was marked by the investiture of a special frock (KHIRQU) symbolising his acceptance of and into a tradition of Divine service mounting back, stage by stage to the Prophet Mohammad." In the Hindu tradition also a sacred ceremony knows as VIRJA HOMA has to be undergone by the would-be monastics. This is a sacred ceremony which is gone through on the occasion of taking the vow of monastic life like the vows of life-long celibacy and poverty. They dedicate their lives to the realisation of God and the service of men and assume new names to signify their utter severance from the former ways of life. Monastics of Ramakrishna Movement also undergo this ceremony of renouncing the world.

It has been noticed that even in the understanding of the common meaning of the fundamental principle of 'SHAHADAH' the Sufis stand apart a little from the main stream which prompts Martin Lings to point out: "...this objective difference involves a corresponding subjective difference, for there arise the question: who is it that can bear witness that there is no god but GOD, no reality but REALITY? And for the Sufis the answer to this question lies in Divine Name Ash-Shahid (the WITNESS) which significantly enough, comes next to al-Haqq (the Truth, the Reality) in the most often recited litany of the Names." The point is then, "if alone is, no testimony can be valid except His. It is hypocrisy to affirm the Oneness of Being from a point of view which is itself in contradiction with truth, and it was no doubt to

galvanize his disciples into awareness of this that Hallaj uttered his devastating paradox: 'who so testifyeth that God is One thereby setteth up another beside Him' (namely his own individual self as the testifier)." (Akhbor al-Hallaj, No. 49)

Sri Ramakrishna's opinion and the illustration he gives is very apt in this context. Talking about the Knowledge of Brahman he remarked: "Brahman is beyond vidya and avidya, knowledge and ignorance, It is beyond maya, the illusion of duality...... In samadhi one attains Knowledge of Brahman - one realizes Brahman. In that state, reasoning stops altogether and man becomes mute. He has no powers to describe the nature of Brahman" His (the aspirant's) state is like that of the salt doll which went to measure the depth of the ocean. It wanted to tell others how deep the water was. But this it could not do for no sooner did it get into the water than it melted. Now who was there to report the ocean's depth?" (Gospel, page 101 & 103) Ofcourse at the same time he has also said that"... when a man merges himself in God, he can no longer retain wicked or sinful tendencies..... Yes, he keeps only the 'Knowledge ego', the 'devotee ego', the 'servant ego' and the 'good ego'. His 'wicked ego' disappears. (Ibid page 252) The Master has also spoken of another 'ego' much purer in a sense, to be continued for the sake of Divine Mission, if there be any, even after the liberation.

The matter of difference is neatly explained away by Martin Ling when he says: "The witness must be, not the self, but the Self which means that the soul is not competent to voice Shahadah." In this regard Sufis are more reasonable and soft and never that absolutistic and rigorous in view. They being more humane are never that adamant in their doctrinal approach. So as Ling points out, all the Sufi Orders are in agreement about this, though they may differ in their methods of bridging the gap between hypocrisy and sincerity. In some Orders, by contrast with

the single recitation which is legally sufficient, the novice is made to recite the Shahadah hundred of thousands of times in order that he learn to bring it out from a deeper point of consciousness; and even then, although he is allowed doctrinal knowledge of the Oneness of Being, he will not be allowed to meditate on the doctrine if he is judged to be intellectually too dormant.

May be this is what made Sri Ramakrishna to declare that knowledge (Supreme combination of Advaita and Consiousness) is the best path; through this means one can practice any type of 'Sadhana' no doubt, he was more in favour of sustained faith in the Divine and complete surrender than to sticking and getting entangled in pure and dry philosophy. He once remarked: 'I cherish only two desires: to be the king of ecstatic lovers and never to become a cross, dry asceticOne cannot recognise God, the Simple One, unless one is simple". (Great Swan, page 4) In this regard he was more of a devotee (bhakta) than a Jnani (knower). In this respect the Master's view on the subject resembled the principles of Sufi cult very much.

If one goes by the views aired by Ling it looks as though in Sufism and in Islam in general stringent rules governed the novice: for he states that "this first pillar of Islam is two-fold. (1) the 'testifier' must testify also that Muhammad is the Messenger of God - Muhamadun Rasulu Llah. (2) the 'traveller' must learn to see in this also an epitome of the spiritual path, of the wave that can take him to the end of his journey. Both testifications end alike. But whereas La ilaha illa Llah with a negative note which signifies the turning of one's back on the world, Muhammadun Rasulu Llah, begins with the state of human perfection as starting point for the realization of all that lies beyond." Sri Ramakrishna used to call it an awareness of the human kind, a standard of/for the soul.

Further according to Ling: "In other words there is a chasm between this formula and the novice, who is not allowed in some

Orders to repeat it methodically until the repetition of the first Sahadah has loosened certain constrictions in his soul and brought him to a point of being able to bridge the gap in aspiration and place his subjectivity in the name of Muhammad." (What is Sufism, page 76). As though touching upon the same subject Sri Ramakrishna has said: "The path of monastic discipline is not necessary for everyone who longs to awaken. The passion for external renunciation is like a bolt of lightning. It may strike at any time, It is not a reasoned choice. But why not renounce all sense of limitation, even the limitation of monastic forms? Why not enjoy all possible dimensions of human experience as already merged in God? Can one get completely inebriated on just a few pennies worth of wine? Fill up the whole pitcher!" (Great Swan, page 64)

Certainly it will not be out of place here to refer to the views of Sw. Tapasyananda in the section 'Introduction' of his book titled 'BHAKTI SCHOOLS OF VEDANTA' analysing this type of notion in his typical manner: "The philosophy of Advaita is however very accommodating and give a place for every kind of aspirants. Even the followers of those (Pandita pasadas) the pseudo scholars are accommodated inspite of contempt shown towards them. They are called Mandhadikaris or the dull-witted aspirants of inferior competency. They are patronisingly permitted to dwell in the cosy base camp of the vyavaharika status and told that their sadhanas are not mere mock-battles, if they are done with the idea of gaining chitta-suddhi or purification of the mind, which is needed to enter the paramarthika or metaphysical level of Reality. They are mock-battles only if they are considered sufficient to take them to the spiritual summum bonum, when purification of the mind is obtained, they have to practise, abiding in the state of Jnana or Unitary Consciousness in which there is no place for a God of adoration." Whereas, in Advaita: In place of adoration, he has to dwell on the oneness of the Self with Brahman, denying the positive nature or actuality of ignorance and all the experience of multiplicity arising from it. This means acceptance of the doctrine of non-existence of God, bondage and the world of multiplicity even when they are being experienced. This is what the doctrine of sublation (Badha) so important in Advaita Vedanta means. No Bhakti Vedantin will be ready to accept such a position."

Sri Ramakrishna never labelled any as 'mandhadhikaris' (dim- witted people); to him everybody was capable of becoming a bhakta and as such he once told Bankim Chandra: the mind of such a person which is said to have become calculating, turbulent and deceitful: "This very same mind can become serene, guileless and innocent by concentrating upon Divine Reality. A mind that has directly perceived Truth, even for an instant, would never jest (on spiritual matters). What purpose can broad scholarship, brillance of expression and commitment to social reform really serve if there is no sound discrimination between what is exalted and what is merely conventional or habitual? And what kind of pandit, or true elder of society, is he who has not utterly renounced the conventional and the habitual? This person may be able to quote long passages from scripture. He may have produced highly technical treatises, composed in traditional or modern style, But if his mind does not spontaneously and effortlessly dwell on God and within God, can you call him a pandit, a man of wisdom?" (Ibid, page 78)

The omnipotence and magnificance of the sacred word according to these soft-liners or the Bhakti Schools of the Islam as these Sufis can be called, who wanted to dive into the deep layers of beyond, the socalled Vyavaharika side of law, life and profiles in Islam, who wanted to experience mystic form of life, according to them: "The repetition of Mohammadun Rasulu Llah with emphasis on the first word is like the donning of a splendid robe which is far too large, but which has the magic power of

making its wearer grow out to its dimensions." At the same time "...the wearer must scarcely admit to himself that he does not fill it: and it is an important part of the spiritual courtesy (adab) of the path that he should also see his fellow disciples as wearers of the same robe and reverence them accordingly. This is another instance of Kaanna (as if) which is no characteristic of Sufism and another example of the primodiality of its perspective. Similarly Ramakrishna Order of Sannyasins inspite of their formal acceptance of the ritual and the robe, were not given due recognition by the orthodox monasteries.

Another point of interest in Sufism is the importance not given to 'sin'. Ling tells us that "the second Sahadah can be taken, methodically, as a refusal to admit that the fall, that is of one's own shortcomings and if need be those of others, a consciousness which finds its expression in the first two words of the first Shahadah La Ilaha, or simply in the negative first word. The two-fold initial pillar of Islam can thus be taken as a combination of the standpoints of fallen and unfallen man, and a Sufi must always be ready to move from one to the other and back again." That is to say Sufism did not bother much as to the 'sin' aspect of man which is a prominent factor of all the Semitic religions - like the Ramakrishnites or the modern neo-Hindus. Priestly religions, including the Catholics stressed this point of 'fall' and the 'sin' in man, including the crucification.

Now coming to the question of purity of body, mind and soul, which everyone will endorse is of great significance for the attainment. Hindus place great importance to this cleanliness not only regarding the body, mind and environment, but also the food partaken - who prepares them and in whose company it is eaten. Swami Vivekananda used to tell: "The food must be simple and taken several times a day instead of once or twice. Never get very hungry. 'He who eats too much cannot be a Yogi. He who fasts

too much cannot be a Yogi...' says Gita. When once my Master (Sri Ramakrishna) was asked 'should one give up eating meat?' he replied: 'Why should give up anything? It will give you up'. Do not give up anything in nature. Make it so hot for nature that she will give you up. There will come a time when you cannot possibly eat meat. The very sight of it will disgust you." (Complete works of Swami Vivekananda, page 518).

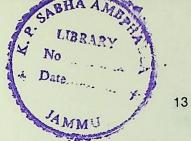
Ling discusses this point as follows: "The second pillar of Islam - to give one more illustration of the difference between the legal and mystical conception of worship - is the ritual prayer together with ablution which is an inseparable part of it. All believers would agree that a rite is a symbolic act and that the ablution symbolises the purification of the soul. But it would no doubt be true to say that the generality of believers look on the ablution simply as a rite which confers a degree of purity judged by Heaven to be sufficient for the performance of the prayer whence a consciousness of being in a state of legal or ritual purity, a consciousness which must not be undermentioned, for it is by definition a 'state of Grace' and therefore open to all manner of blessings." While going deeper into the subject Ling further explains the Sufi point of view: "The Sufi necessarily shares this point of view and this consciousness: but beyond this legal state he is concerned with actual purity which he can 'taste' and which has to be made total and permanent: and for him this ablution is above all a means of extending the purity that has already been achieved and of intensifying his consciousness of it with the help of the transparent and luminous element:" (page 77).

The Sufis were the followers of a branch of Islam that emphasized on an individual life experience and purity more than any mechanical rituals of the group or community religion. Further the word 'SUFI' has some linguistic connection with the word 'SAAF' or pure and" the Sufi is he who keeps his Heart pure (Safi)."

This 'safi' of the heart is very similar to the 'Antar- suchita' of the Hindus and this purity is much more emphasized by the Sufis rather than the external purity and ablution and it is said that according to the Quran, water is one of the symbols of mercy (which incidentally includes purification and of life...)

Christianity pronounces: "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God". This sentence alone would save mankind, if all books and prophets were lost. This purity of heart will bring the vision of God. It is the theme of the whole music of this universe. In purity there is no bondage. Remove the veils of ignorance by purity, then we manifest ourselves as we really are and know that we were never in bondage. The seeing of many is the great sin of all the world. See all as self and love all: let all idea of separateness go." (Selections from Works of Vivekananda, page 417)

Here in this connection we can recall the conversation of the wise bird Hoopoe with the duck and the efficacy of water in ablution. At that time the Hoopoe bird had said: "Oh, you whose delight is in the water which occupies your whole life! Indolently you drowse there - but a wave comes and you are swept away water is good only for those who have a fair countenance and a clear face. If you are such it is well! But how long will you stay clean and pure as the water? (meaning thereby that even the water gets spoiled sometimes due to various reasons)". However it is also said that "a drop of water as well as a lake symbolises the infinite Beatitude into which mercy reintegrates..." No doubt water is the symbol of life, purity and mercy and liberation. Religion and life minus purity is meaningless. History is full of such confrontation in every religion and faith. According to the famous biographer of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Saradananda in his book 'THE GREAT MASTER' - The one purpose, rather significant purpose of the advent of Sri Ramakrishna was to bring back some



more purity in the contemporary world of religion which was already turning out to be some heartless mechanical repetition of rituals and practices without any purity of life.

Besides, Sufis, as explained by Ling, sought to emphasize that voluntary and spotaneous prayers from the depth of the heart is greater than the compulsory and obligatory ritualistic bond or commitments. Sri Ramakrishna also stressed on the Raga-Bhakti (love that comes out of mind and heart sincerely) than on the Vaidhi (ritualistic) Bhakti. Explaining further he said: "Raga- Bhakti is pure love of God, a love that seeks God alone and not any worldly end. Prahlada had it. Suppose you go to a wealthy man every day but you seek no favour of him, you simply love to see him. If he wants to show you favour, you say, 'No, Sir, I don't need anything. I came just to see you' Such is love of God for its own sake. You simply love God and don't want anything from HIM in return..... whereas Vaidhi-bhakti, formal devotion, depends on scriptural injunctions. It comes and goes." Historically also this was an issue of contest. Once upon a time Buddhism also opposed the Karma-yajna (ritualism) of the Mimamsakas on eithical and social grounds. Vedanta also did not like to follow it for it lacked philosophical depth. This may be another reason why Gita attributed a greater meaning to Karma subsequently. This is a kind swing which one can notice everywhere in the course of history.

No one need to be astonished by such developments in history. How truly Ling has pointed out that "...the voluntary and spontaneous prayer has therefore a potential precedence over others by being capable of embracing and penetrating the whole of life, and this is what those who practise methodically the invocation aim at making it do". He further explained: "The Sufis may be said to differ from the majority (of the Muslims) in that when they recite it - or when they listen to it which is ritually

equivalent - they do so as a prolongation of dikhr Allah, with no abatement of their aspiration to return to God. The doctrine of the uncreatedness of the Revealed Book holds out a means of union which is not to be refused. Moreover the soul has need of the Quran as a complement to the Name, being as it is by its very nature what might be called a multiple unity and its God given multiplicity demands a certain direct recognition which is not the Name's function to accord."

Why is this Holy Book so dear and attractive to the devoted? Frithjof Schuon in his book 'UNDERSTANDING ISLAM' tells us: "The multiplicity of the Holy Book - the diversity of its words, sentences, pictures and stories - fills the soul and then absorbs it imperceptibly, transposes it into the climate of serenity and immutability by a sort of divine 'cunning'. The soul, which is accustomed to the flux of the phenomena yields to this flux without resistance, it lies in phenomena and is by then divided and dispersed even more than that, it actually becomes what it thinks and does." The same can be said about the mythological literature and religious histories and puranas of the Hindus that affects the minds of the ordinary men and women with more of distractions and phenomenological diversities than any unifying bonds or concepts that will lead to spiritual progress.

Frithjof Schuon's other part of the observation on this is more revealing and interesting: "The revealed Discourse has the virtue that it accepts this tendency while at the same time reversing the movement, thanks to the celestial nature of the content and the language, so that the fishes of the soul swim without distrust and with the habitual rhythm into the Divine net."

Actually the Sufis were much more interested and serious in the experience of God - as they were serious about that deeper meaning of Shahadah only claiming 'None is worshipable but GOD'. They were interested only in HIM and were least entangled

with the ideas of HIS (God's) creations, not even His glories and power. In this respect they were one with Sri Ramakrishna who again and again emphasized that one should be nearer and closer to God and not to His glories etc. Once he remarked: "Why do people dwell so much on God's glories? Is there any great need of repeating such things as 'O God! Thou hast created the moon, the sun and the stars? Most people are filled with admiration for the garden only. How few care to see its owner? Who is greater, the garden or its ownerWhen I met Narendra (later Swami Vivekananda) I never asked him: 'Who is your father? How many houses does he own? Shall I tell you the truth? Man loves his own riches, and so he thinks that God loves His too. He thinks that God will be pleased if we glorify His riches..." (Gospel, page 321) It is even said that some piligrims had come from the Punjab and started singing the glories of God, specially His creation which the Master did not relish at all. Occasionally he also spoke of his unpleasant experience of regarding the auxilliary nature of spiritual outlook, giving up the prominence to be given to the primary and principal Character - God and praising, instead of praying, His creation - by saying 'how wonderful is this creation of His' etc.

Atleast the taking of God's name brings one nearer to the spiritual goal than this mere repetition and glorification of his attributes, achievements etc. etc. However it is this glorification exercise around which most of the litanies are developed in different religions. Ling points out: "The Name and the Book are two poles between which lie a wealth of possibilities of invocation and litany, some being nearer to the pole and some to the other." Whereas - "Name may be said to have another complement which is very different from the Revealed Book though parallel to it in the sense that it directly recognises the diffused nature of the soul, and this is the individual prayer (not exactly the group prayer)

when the supplicant speaks directly to the Divinity as to another person, telling him of his difficulties and his needs, for himself and for those near to him (like family, friends etc.)for it is essential that this prayer should be laying bare of the individual and two individuals are alike." (WHAT IS SUFISM, page 80) It is very well known that Sri Ramakrishna used to tell his devotees that the Divine Mother often used to talk to him. Just to mention a particular instance we have to go to Swami Saradananda's book 'THE GREAT MASTER': it is said that "(Totapuri) arriving at the Kali temple came first of all to the big open portico of the Ghat. Wearing only one piece of cloth the Master was then sitting in an absent-minded mood looking like any ordinary person. As soon as Tota's eyes fell on the Master's face radiant with austerity and beaming with the surge of devotion, he was attracted towards him and asked the Master of his own accord: You seem to be a well qualified aspirant: do you like to practise Vedantic discipline?' The Master said in answer to the tall, naked mendicant with matted hair: 'I know nothing of what I should do or not do: my Mother knows everything: I shall do as She commands'. Tota replied. 'Then, go, ask your mother and come back: for I may not be staying here for long'. Without saying anything in reply the Master went slowly to the Divine Mother's temple. There, he in a state of ecstasy, he heard the Divine Mother's words of advice: 'Go and learn: it is in order to teach you that the monk has come here" (page 285).

All religions give great importance to the act of excluding the profane from the sacred gradually by the aspirants. Not only to exclude "atheism and agnosticism but also an exoterism which claims to be self- sufficient and to compromise within its narrow compass all that is required of man by way of response to Divine Revelation," is very essential. Rightly Ling points out that "Religion in itself cannot be called profane in any one of its aspects, but the

majority of its adherents at any rate in later times, form collectively a domain as it were of two dimensions only. Profanity is a flat outwardness. Sufism's dismissal of it, is expressed in the words of the Quran: Say Allah, 'then leave them to their idle talk' (VI:91) The Name ALLAH is as we have seen, the good word which the Quran likens to a good tree. Idle or profane talk that is flat outward talk, is the bad word which the Quran likens to a bad tree sprawling uprooted across the ground for lack of firm foundation.' (XIV/26)"

Hindu Scriptures are also full of such thoughts. The much revered Mundaka Upanishad says: "There are two kinds of knowledge to be acquired - the higher and the lower the lower is the code of rituals, grammar, etymology, metre and astrology. Then there is the higher (knowledge) by which is realised that Immutable. The same Upanishad illustrates the point beautifully thus: Two birds that are ever associated and have similar names, cling to the same tree. Of these, the one eats the fruit of divergent tastes, and the other looks on without eating similarly on the same tree, the individual soul remains drowned (i.e. stuck) as it were: and so it moans, being worried by its impotence. When it sees thus the other, the adored Lord and His glory, then it becomes liberated from Sorrow". (MUNDAKA UPANISHAD translated by Swami Gambhirananda, pages 9 and 67)

Sri Ramakrishna used to talk often about the 'Un-ripe I' and the 'Ripe I':" 'I' and 'mine' indicate ignorance. Without ignorance one cannot have such a feeling as 'I am the doer! these are my wife, children, possessions, name and fameThe 'servant ego', the 'knowledge ego' or the 'devotee ego' may be called the 'ripe ego'. It is different from the 'unripe ego'" (Gospel page 860). It is in this connection we can still recall many of the sayings of the Master comparing the Holy-name as the antidote which is very helpful in driving away all the undesirable ghosts

and birds from the tree of life. We have already quoted some of these saying here and there in the course of this paper on Sufi-Ramakrishna study. Sri Ramakrishna did not also like gossip, idle talk or worldly talk and was quick in drawing the caricature of such worldly people gossiping about money and women. He had also observed the fact that there were and are people who could not bear divine or religious exposure for a long time and such people would take leave of him on the excuse that they had to visit the temples still. Such people preferred to stay away from such divine talk and religious atmosphere and would rather spend their time in ordinary and frivolous gossip. He compared such people to the fisher woman who could not sleep in a room where fragrant roses were kept, but preferred to sleep beside her foul-smelling fish backet. In place of the 'sprawling uprooted tree' mentioned in the Quran he said that very often nice rose and flower gardens were over-run by unwanted weeds. Such weeds are there in plenty in all religions and the worldly and profane conversations are called 'Gramya' (village-type) in some of the Vaishnava literature of Bengal and it is common for a Guru to rebuke his disciple by saying 'Gramya-katha-na-kahibe' (not to speak of this mundane affairs of the world like the ignorant villager).

Since proclivity and profanity cannot go well in the spiritual life they have either to be completely given up or transform them into love of god and fellow beings gradually. These are all outward tendencies which have to be gathered up into a holy inwardness and ofcourse this process should be slow but steady. For this Sri Ramakrishna's suggestion was more for directing the mind towards the Divine goal slowly and never be in great haste to tendencies suddenly. Concurring with the Master, Ling says: "Enough has already been said to make clear that Sufism does not exclude the outward as such nor indeed could it, given that

the outward is one of the Divine Names. But in Reality the outward is one with the inward. For the Sufi all outwardness must therefore be related to the Inward, which is another way of saying that from His is this world the world of symbols."

From all that has been said about this, it is clear that Sufism does not at any time negate the world altogether but approves the gradual divinisation, rather a qualified attitude of the Vishista- Advaita followed by the Hindus. Swami Saradananda in the biography of Sri Ramakrishna - 'THE GREAT MASTER' states:" the doctrines of dualism, qualified non-dualism and non-dualism come of themselves to each man with his spiritual progress. The Master, therefore, said that they were not contradictory to one another but depended on particular stages of evolution of the human mind." (Page 343). As regarding the Sufi attitude Ling tells us that: "What Sufism excludes is the 'independent outwardness of profanity in which the ego gives its attention to the things of this, entirely for their own sakes. But methodically, since such outwardness has become 'second nature' to man, it may be necessary to restore the balance by temporally excluding all outwardness in so far as may be possible." Possibly the theoretical and abstract philosopher type of Advaitin stressed too much of a kind of unqualified negativeness and outlook of this world - in order to stress the transcendental type!

It is quite enlightening when Ling says: "It was from this point of view that Hatim-al-Asamm (a 9th Century Sufi, popularly known as 'the deaf' (al-asamm) since he preferred to avoid hearing any talk or conversation of a flippant nature) who said: 'Every morning, Satan saith unto me, what will thou eat, what will thou put on and where wilt thou dwell? And I say unto him: I will eat death and put on my shroud and dwell in the tomb." (Qushayri Risalah).

In order to avoid this kind of profanity in the name of Divinity, Sri Ramakrishna also preferred and stressed only an 'inwardness' as against ostentatious deeds like grand pujas, building of big hospitals dispensaries, roads and other kind of services' and exoteric behaviour of religion. Once asked about the great scholar and philanthropist Pundit Vidyasagar the Master had no hesitation to say", Vidyasagar has both scholarship and charity but he lacks inner vision. Gold lies hidden within him. Had he but found it out, his activities would have been reduced, finally they would have stopped altogether. Had he but known that God resides in his heart, his mind would have been directed to God in thought and meditation." (Gospel, page 267).

Religion first of all means experience - realization. In any religion the first item on the agenda is personal life and then ofcourse comes the question of how to live and adjust in this world which is formed of the outer bodies/society, organisation, activities etc. etc. However as one proceeds in the spiritual journey towards the highest goal - realisation, these outward activities are likely to fall off. Sri Ramakrishna gave the example of how this happens: "When the flower develops into fruit, the petals drop off of themselves. So when the divinity in you increases, the weakness of human nature in you will vanish of its own accord." Again a tree sheds off old dry leaves (dry leaves here stand for the world with all its temptations and sorrows as well) before new leaves appear and an affectionate mother-in-law reduces the work load on her young daughter-in-law when her (daughter-in-law's) pregnancy advances and finally she forbades her to do any work."

As one dives deeper into the study of Sufism the question naturally arises as to the position of mysticism in the same. Ling points out: "Sufism has the right to be inexorable because mysticism is the sole repository of Truth in the fullest sense, being concerned above all with the Absolute, the Infinite and the

Eternal." Because: "If (suppose) the salt has lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted?" Really, "Without mysticism Reality would have no voice in the world. There would be no record of the true hierarchy and no witness that it is being continually being violated." Supporting the attitude of Sufism on this he says further: "Sufism has the right and the obligation to be inexorable not only objectively as regards declaring that first things are first but subjectively as regards putting them first - whence its exactness.:" (WHAT IS SUFISM? page 93/94)

For Sri Ramakrishna: "The secret of the mystic way - including both path and goal, for they cannot be separated - is total, passionate love for God alone, for sheer Divine Reality, however you may envision or experience it in the depth of your being. This all-embracing, all transcending love comes first. Formal disciplines of prayer and meditation are of secondary importance, although they do arise spontaneously out of authentic love" (GREAT SWAN, page 62/63)

According to Swami Vivekananda: "Religions manifest themselves not only according to race and geographical position, but according to individual powers. In one man religion is manifesting itself as intense activity, as work. In another it is manifesting itself as intense devotion, in yet another, as mysticism, in another philosophy and so forth..." (Selections from Works of Swami Vivekananda, page 354)

Dwelling on this subject let not the objective side of the spiritual life, which is likely to slip-out altogether, get out of sight. Let Frithjof Schuon's book guide us: "Knowledge only serves us on condition that it enlists all that we are, only when it is a why and when it works and transforms and wounds our nature even as the plough wounds the soil - Metaphysical Knowledge is sacred. It is the right of the sacred things to require of man all that he is" (Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts, page 38). Sri

Ramakrishna was very fond of discussing all the aspects of 'Knowledge', once he said: "When fire enters charcoal it destroys its innate blackness. So when the mind is burnt by the fire of Knowledge, its innate nature too is destroyed, and it ceases to be a snare. (Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna)

Swami Vivekananda said: "Spiritual knowledge is the only thing that can destroy our miseries for ever: any other knowledge satisfies wants only for a time. It is only with the knowledge of the spirit that the faculty of want is annihilated for ever: so helping a man spiritually is the highest help that can be given to him. He who gives man spiritual knowledge is the greatest benefactor of mankind, as such we always find that those were the most powerful of men who helped man in his spiritual needs, because spirituality is the true basis of all our activities in life....The gift of knowledge is a far higher gift than that of food and clothes: it is even higher than giving life to a man because the real life of man consists of knowledge." (Selections from Works of Sw. Vivekananda, page 19)

Sri Vaikuntha Nath Sanyal, a householder disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and the author of 'SRI SRI RAMAKRISHNA LILAMRITA' in Bengali says: "Devotion and knowledge are identical in the end. People do not understand them well and mistakenly think that they are different. What is bhakti (devotion)? Love for God and playing with Him in various waysknowledge also means absolute love. That love is so intense that the jnani (the man of knowledge) never wants to be seperated from God. He wants to become one with Him. Hence he says 'I am He. I am Shiva, the Absolute.'" (RAMAKRISHNA AS WE SAW HIM, page 348)

It is right on this point to say that Sufis too accepted to some extent an objective character - otherwise it was mostly like other mystic experiences overwhelmingly subjective. It is here, where we find Sri Ramakrishna's Bhakti (Divine Love) mixed up with Jnana (Knowledge and the metaphysical aspect of the Reality) is comparatively more objective and more meaningful, mainly because of the Indian background and Vedantic tradition which is much more congruous and synthetic in its approach to faith and religion. The Islamic background was not that congenial and that is the reason.

Besides all these, Sufism was much more individualistic and freedom loving than the general outlook of its absolutistic genus-body Islam as a faith. Definitely the Sufism was much more liberal than the main core of its Islamic faith and its (Islam's) monolithic religious culture. Therefore, it is very natural that, "The exclusive aspect of Sufism only concerns those who are qualified to be 'travellers' in the fullest sense.....But paradoxically this exclusive aspect is sometimes a means of inclusion. A few of the multitudes of atheists and agnostics in the world are what they are for reason which cannot be considered as altogether inexcusable."

Sri Ramakrishna also bemoaned as to how many are there in the world who can be qualified as 'travellers in the fullest sense'. According to him, a true traveller should: "Cry to the Lord with an intensely yearning heart and you will certainly see HIM. People shed a whole jug of tears for wife and children. They swim in tears for money But who weeps for God? Cry to HIM with a real cry." (Gospel, page 83)

Are all people religious and spiritual; believing in what the sacred Book and saints say? Does a person feel that he is an atheist at any time of his life? According to Swami Vivekananda: "A man who does not belive in himself is an atheist. We are all atheists let us confess it. Mere intellectual assent does not make us religious" (Complete Works: pages 294 and 164). It is also said that: "Atheism or agnosticism can be the revolt of a virtual mystic

against the limitations of exoterism: for a man may have in himself, underdeveloped, the qualifications for following a spiritual path even in the fullest sense and yet at the same time - and this is more than ever possible in the modern world - he may be ignorant of the existence of religion's mystical dimension. His atheism or agnosticism may be based on the false assumption that religion coincides exactly with the outward and shallow conception of it, many of its socalled 'authorities' exclusively profess." Organisationally, "There are souls which are prepared to give either everything or nothing."

According to Ling: "The inexorable exactingness of Sufism has been known to save those who could be saved by no other means: it has saved them from giving nothing by demanding that they shall give everything." This kind of tyaga or renunciation based religion of faith is a new kind of its own on the spiritual horizon that grew up with Sri Chaitanya and matured in Sri Ramakrishna. The Master used to say: "Persons who are bound by conventional, egocentric perspectives will never be able to listen to true teaching, which always calls one to renounce convention of every kind and to consecrate each breath and every uniquely precious moment of experience to divine Reality alone. Lord Chaitanya - the Krishna dancer of Bengal, Divine Love incarnate, whose sanctifying waves of devotion still sweep across this land after three hundred years - used skillful means to attract persons hopelessly enmeshed in the habit of selfish desireChaitanya gave his companions a clear mandate. Bring the revolution of Love, openly, nakedly and freely to one and all, with absolutely no dinstinction of caste, class or creed. Again and again, with evident delight, he repeated: 'The lovers of God have no caste. They belong to no conventional social or religious context.' "(GREAT SWAN, page 94) And according to his worthy disciple Swami Vivekananda: "Renunciation is the very basis

upon which ethics stands and it is the very basis of our true life. This is the stepping-stone and the real centre and the real heart of all spiritual culture - renunciation. Renunciation, and renunciation alone is the real secret, the Mulamantra of all Realisation." (Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda).

Generally, the religion of love and devotion are taken by people in an easy manner and as a short cut to fulfill certain desires of their own. Sri Ramakrishna tells: "Those that are of low tendencies seek occult powers which help in healing diseases, winning lawsuits, walking on water and such other things." Hence he always used to advise people not to seek them. Similarly Sufis too were in this respect somewheat different from the mainstream. They never indulged in practises for fulfilling their own desires, they were never a desire fulfilling type. Actually what 'tyaga' meant to this type of people who were devoted, loving and sincere people was not to become too 'dry' by negation, but to surrender to Lord and give as much as possible to the poor and needy. Sri Ramakrishna used to say again and again. 'I do not want to be a dry ascetic'. No doubt Vedanta is pessimistic so far as it negates the world of the senses, but it is optimistic in its assertions of the real world declared Swami Vivekananda.

'Renunciation' to most of the Vaishnava Schools in India has another positive meaning viz. always 'love and sacrifice' of a special kind (VAISHESHA-ANURAGA) born out of devotion and dedication which is no less deeper than the socalled ordinary negative view of tyaga or renunciation. This is true of Hindus; then what about the Sufis? Let us turn to Ling for the answer: "The Prophet said of the 'Shahadah' which is we have seen, the epitome of Sufi doctrine and method; If the seven Heavens and the seven Earths were put it in one scale, they would be overweighed by 'lla ilaha Llah.' Instead of the seven heavens and seven earth - Sri Ramakrishna has a much more colloquial

manner by referring to the building of 'hospitals' and 'dispensaries' that is to say charitable activities in place of the Divinity and the Divine Name directly. The idea is almost verging in the same way with all emphasis on God.

However Swami Vivekananda, the worthy disciple of Sin Ramakrishna was much more action-oriented and bold and as such, he just ventured forward and founded an Order consisting of monks as well as devotees which later came to be known as the RAMAKRISHNA MISSION serving multitudes in various ways irrespective of caste and creed. Taking into consideration the initial lack of qualifications for the one-pointed devotion essential for a spiritual life, he sought to put them all into an actionprogramme of wide dimensions of serving people who were in distress. To him Jiva was Siva. How much Swami Vivekananda's modern trend, love for the less fortunate and modification of rigid religious ideas holding sway over the centuries is similar to that of the Sufis is brought out by Ling when he comments:" But such active forces demand a conformity of passive strength in the soul of anyone who brings them into action. In other words, they (the Sufis) demand a patience and steadfastness which will prolong their action enough for them to take effect in a domain which is subject to time. Failing these virtues, which are part of the qualification (i.e. not the Temporal, but the Eternity must first have left its imprint on the soul and virtues of patience and steadfastness are a necessary part of that imprint) to enter in Sufi Order, there can be great danger in the practise of Sufism as in every incongruous alliance of weakness and strength - 'children playing with fire' is the proverbial example." Swami Vivekananda ofcourse stressed upon the dictum 'Atmano Moksharto' (liberation of the Self) with all its priorities against 'Jagat-hitaya-cha' (service to the world), which also happens to be the second motto of the Ramakrishna Order and Movement.

It is often said that progress in spiritualism and the achievement of the goal of Realisation demands complete faith; no half-house efforts will do: it is do or die. Therefore rightly Ling has said: "It is true in a sense that every believer must become a Sufi sooner or later, if not in this life than in the next, but it is also true that a great majority suffer from disqualifications that only death can dissolve. It would be dangerous for such people to seek to follow the mystic path, but they are seldom tempted to do so. The danger lies in what might be called border-line cases." (Ibid page 95). Sri Ramakrishna has many a time described such mediocre border-line cases as luke- warm aspirants;".... true sannyasis those who are able to devote their minds constantly to God, are like bees, which light only on flowers and sip their honey. Those who live in the world, in the midst of 'woman and gold' may direct their attention to God but sometimes their minds dwell also on 'woman and gold'. They are like common flies, which light on a piece of candy then on a sore or filth." (Gospel, page 210). Swami Vivekananda put down hard conditions for those who aspired to become sannyasins by saying that one who aspired for sanyas must be prepared to die for the cause and the sannyasin is to love death. "The worldly people love life; the sannyasin is to love death. It is right for you that you (sannyasins) should serve your millions of brothers rather than aggrandise this little selfThus you must die a gradual death. In such a death is heaven, all good is stored therein - and in its opposite is all that is diabolical and evil". (Selections from the Works of Swami Vivekananda, page 364/365)

Talking about the aspirants and the novices who wish to join any religious order, there is bound to arise the question, are all those who aspire have pure motives to tread on this hard path? Are they prompted or tempted by any other reason than to realise oneself? Very few people have observed the way as Ling does

since he is of the opinion that:" ... the fact that purification marks the end of Sufism means that the soul of the novice is bound to be relatively impure. In particular, a novice is unlikely to have an altogether pure motive for seeking to join a tariquah: legitimate aspiration is liable to be alloyed at first, albeit unconsciously, with individual ambition. The 'Dikr' itself eventually sifts 'the grain from the chaff', the aspiration welcomes it, whereas it arouses the antagonism of the elements of impurity: and when the soul has been divided into two groups or camps for the greater Holy war, it is to be expected that the scales should be heavily weighted against the enemies of the spirit. If the soul had not the right inclination to begin with, it would normally not come to the point of seeking to enter an order. Nonetheless it is by no means impossible that an individual should be attracted to Sufism for predominantly wrong reasons." (What is Sufism, page 95).

That last sentence of Ling in the above paragraph seems to hold good not only in Sufism but almost in all religions; it is a fact that due to some kind of secret ambitions and desires in life and for wrong reasons in thinking that Sufism like the Vaishnava Bhakti cult, both based on the conception of love are easy and pleasant paths to spirituality. Naturally, those who begin that way by mixing up romantic love with Divine-love end up with disastrous consequences even before reaching the mid-way. It had to end that way since these people had taken their passion to be an urge for the Divine. Although Sufis might not be having the life long vow of celibacy and asuterity like in some religions but purity in spiritual life was their watch-word and considered very essential.

Sri Ramakrishna also considered the responsibility of a sannyasi to be quite heavy, for he said: "Worldly people learn renunciation by seeing the complete renunciation of a monk:otherwise they sink more and more. A sannyasi is a world teacher." (Gospel page 184) The Master also warned against

some kind of sadhus: "There are three classes of sadhus, good, mediocre and bad. The good sadhu makes no effort to get his food. The dandis, among others, belong to the mediocre and bad classes. To get food the mediocre sadhu will knock at the door of a house and say, 'Namo Narayana'. The bad sadhu starts a quarrel if he doesn't get his alms" (Ibid page 656) Swami Vivekananda too desired in his Math Rules, proper scanning at some stage or other by the novices themselves and decide as to whether to opt for life-long (Naisthik) brahmacharya or to go back to ordinary household life.

Discussing on this point Ling comments: "It is much better for the intellectual believer to reject this doctrine than to let it act as a soporific for his fear of God and take the edge off his exoteric piety, while it involves him at the same time in an inward conflict for which he has not the strength!" What actually happens is that most people are torn between the intellectualism and a dogmatic faith or cult, which finally leads to compromise more than to a confrontation. This is what happened to Sufis also according to Ling for he says: "The intellectual sees the supreme identity as it were through the veil of 'FAMA', extinction, which imposes on the soul an inexorable ambition-excluding FAQR, spiritual poverty, for the sense of the descendent, which the intellectual possess by definition necessarily implies the sense of the relative unimportance of all that is untranscendent and individual" (page 96)

Buddhists seemed to have had ultimately reckoned to a sort of middle-path that too historically turned out to be not very fruitful or effective either, although extra-ordinary personalities, intellectuals and spiritual men and women were amongst those who were attracted to Buddhism after the introduction of this middle-path notion. Subsequent developments and events have shown that mostly mediocre people have risen to the horizon

thereafter. In Chinese philosophy and the religion of social and filial piety there was very little scope for any kind of growth of extreme renunciation etc. Neo-Platonics were to some extent exclusively intellectual extremists. However Aristotle presented some idea of 'mean' or a properly proportionate life. His view was based on a kind of moral and intellectual proportion. By 'mean' or 'middle' he meant something like that, whereas Hindu yogis (Yoga-system) gave importance to certain ideas like that of a 'proportionate - being' (STHITA-PRAGNA) - a balanced one, spiritually as well as psychologically. There is nothing irrational or irregular in them either in their actions or reactions. In Gita Lord Krishna tells Arjuna that such a person (STHITA-PRAGNA) when he'abandons, O Partha, all the desires of the heart and is satisfied in the Self by the Self, then is he said to be one stable in wisdom. He whose mind is not perturbed by adversity, who does not crave for happiness, who is free from fondness, fear and anger, is the Muni of constant wisdom." (Chap. 2, Sloka 55 & 56) Sri Ramakrishna described such a person as: "For the man who sees from the peak of a hill, the tall trees, the grass, the ups and downs and everything on the plains below seem alike. The Brahma-jnani likewise sees divinity alone in everything. He makes no distinction between the good and the bad and between the superior and the inferior "

While discussing spiritual and religious matters, one often wonders how decay sets in religion - any religion for that matter. May be the cause is lack of intellectual development to some extent; according to Ling: "....lack of intellectuality, combined with the mental arrogance which in some degree or other is the normal result ...(that) can produce the phenomena of an unenlightened soul incapable of admitting even to itself that any mode of knowledge could be beyond its scope; and for such a soul a contact with a religion based on love of God and the discovery of

its doctrine and its aims could bring about the worst and the most incurable form of hardness of heart. Swami Vivekananda attributes the fall of a religion to petty outlook and narrow selfishness.

This is one of the reasons why Swami Vivekananda encouraged cultivation of Knowledge (Jnana) always to keep out such a stagnation from any religious order - which otherwise, according to him, would make it perverted and sick. Yet inspite of his advocating the middle-path approach Swami Vivekananda in his personal life specially extolled the value of confrontation and challenge - for him in opposing all that was not right alone life flourished and developed. No wonder he was well known for his quick response as well as for his sharper reaction.

Spirituality and Realisation are not easy to achieve, as many people are prone to think. Swami Vivekananda used to warn: "Spirituality can never be attained until materiality is gone and all material ideas are given up." Swami Tapasyananda in his book 'SPIRITUAL QUEST' remarks as to why the path to spiritualism is hard: ".....we expect a purely intellectually apprehended idea to sublate an actual sensual and mental experience. God is only an intellectual assumption to most people. The 'other things' are not intellectual assumptions but actual experiences with the senses. Now can these experiences which are of a concrete nature and are actually entering into one's daily life, be eradicated unless it be by an equally powerful counter-experience?" (page 22).

A prominent writer describing the process of spiritual unfoldment says: ".... the first glimmering of spiritual realization was only granted after long years of sustained effort". He dismisses the modern false notion of 'instant realisation' when he says: "The idea that any comparable result could be achieved by taking a pill betrays a disqualifying lack of sense of the sacred -

'sense of God' one might say." Ordinary people in their zeal to achieve spiritual excellence often commit the mistake of thinking that an easier way to God realisation is to combine the profane love with Divine Love and go to the extent of thinking life to be a spiritual passion - something similar to any other type of human love and affection. What actually they fail to understand and comprehend is the tremendous effort that is needed in purging out desires, passion, egoism etc. - in Sri Ramakrishna's words 'kamini and kanchana' and the number of secrifices which are implied therein when one is in one pointed pursuance of Divine Love.

So what happens to such persons? It is very natural that: "That profane man is conscious of only a small part of his own soul: and since its whole substance has to be discovered, mystical practises often lead first of all to experiences which are not spiritual but only psychic, however strange and even wonderful they may seem: and it may be that some such experiences could lay bare a hitherto unknown egoic nucleus which lack of intellectual discrimination might deem transcandent."

Swami Brahamananda once talking on this subject to a devotee has remarked: "......this differs according to the different mental attitudes of aspirants. While practising meditation an aspirant first sees light. With this vision the mind experiences a kind of joy and does not want to move forward. Then he sees a luminous form and his mind gets absorbed in that. Sometimes the mind becomes absobred while listening to the long sound of OM. Is there any end to the realm of vision and realization? The more you advance the more you will realize that this realm is infinite. Some people, seeing a little light think that is the end, but it is NOT. Some say it is the end of sadhana when the mind stops functioning, and again some say that it is the beginning. That is the weakness of the mind. The mind has reached the limit of its

capability and then it is incapable of grasping more. All minds do not have the same capacity. One should strive to increase the capacity of one's mind. The Master used to say, 'Brahmacharya increases the power of the mind.' Lust and anger cannot perturb a strong mind. They are insiginifcant to a man of steady mind. He has attained so much self-confidence that passions cannot perturb him. There are many obstacles in spiritual life. For that reason 'mudras' (gestures of the hands) purification of the asana and elements and other practises are prescribed in ritualistic worship." (A Guide to Spiritual Life, page 116/117)

Obstacles are many indeed! How can any ordinary lay man/woman be expected to have such high standard of intellectual discrimination or expect it to be aroused from within. As already stated many are such short-falls like the lack of physical purity and austerity, lack of intellectual discrimination even just enough to clear oneself from the kind of psychic imprisonment and limitations of the mind. Therefore for the advancement of the spiritual and cultural life it is imperative that there must be an urge to go beyond the finite and mundane horizon of all the socalled materialistic and animal life. And the greatest danger is that this point of individual consciousness should be considered as the Supreme Self and that the whole doctrine, together with the traditionally recorded experiences of the saints should be complacently interpreted as a confirmation and a nourishment for this worst of all self-deceptions.

What is the remedy? It is said that: "Such dangers can be avoided altogether by obedience to the Spiritual Master - by being, as the Sufis say, 'like a corpse in the hands of the washer of the dead." Complete obedience and surrender to God was the most effective remedy suggested by Sri Ramakrishna and he explained this obedience as the ultimate obedience to God, who is the sole authority and moving force behind everything - including the

reality. Individuality, free will, action everything is under HIS will and obdience. To him complete obedience is due only to God and Divinity and not to any other person or mundane order. Once he silenced a doctor who was attending on him and was of the opinion that a man acts according to his free will by telling him; ".....Don't think that I have achieved my desired end because of you, a rich man, show me respect. It matters very little to me whether you obey me or not. Ofcourse you must remember that a mere man can do nothing. It is God alone who makes one person obey another. Man is straw and dust before the power of GodWhat can a man do before the will of God. Arjuna said to Sri Krishna in the battle-field of Kurukshetra: 'I will not fight' Sri Krishna replied: 'Arjuna, you will have to fight. Your very nature will make you fight' Then Sri Krishna revealed to Arjuna that all the men on the battle field were already dead." Again he referred to some Sikhs who had come to the Kali temple at Dakshineswar and had remarked: "You see, the leaves of the aswatha tree are moving. That too is due to the will of God. Without His will not even a leaf can move." (Gospel page 891/892) What Sri Ramakrishna has said about man being nothing but straw and dust before the power of God is very similar to what the Sufis had said about the helplessness of man by saying 'like a corpse in the hands of a washer of the dead'

Actually what we were discussing before we digressed was about the confusion regarding the psychological ego and the transcendental ego getting mixed up due to lack of intellectual discrimination. It has already been quoted sometime back how Sri Ramakrishna used to warn about the lower-ego which is nothing but a psychological-self and which he termed as the unripened ego and being very immature. He further stated that when this unripened self goes away or is got rid off by sadhana only then the dirt goes and an unsoiled purer and higher Self

emerges out of us. He also made it very clear that he does not mean this awakening to be an intellectual exercise only. Everybody will agree that this contact of the higher self at the transcendental level is all due to intuition and a spiritual involvement of the soul - not ofcourse the psychological soul merely.

Now the question arises: what is the difference between obedience and surrender? On the surface it looks as though there is very little difference but probing deeper, it is obvious, where obedience submission or compliance a law or authority; it may be voluntary or enforced whereas surrender is the act of emptying oneself his/her ego voluntarily, so that the Cosmic can play its fullest role without any hinderance or obstruction placed by our individual self. God wants us to surrender: according to Gita self surrender is "like a stream joining a rivulet, a rivulet having its confluence with a river and a river making itself over to the ocean. Self-surrender is verily self-fulfilment. The will of the Jivatman merges in the Will of the Lord. (Chap. 18, Sloka 66) When the doctor attending on him asked Sri Ramakrishna: "If everything is done by the Will of God, then why do you chatter? Why do you talk so much to bring knowledge to others?" the Master replied: "He makes me talk; therefore I talk. I am the machine and He is the operator." According to Swami Vivekananda: "To work I have the right. Mother knows the rest: we are her automata: She is the wire-puller."

How well the Master illustrates the helplessness of a man when compared to the power of God by narrating a simple everyday occurrence thus: "If a man truly believes that God alone does everything that He is the Operator and man the machine, then such a man is verily liberated in life Vedanta philosophy gives an illustration: suppose you are cooking rice in a pot with potato, egg-plant and other vegetables. After a while the potatoes,

egg-plant, rice and the rest begin to jump about in the pot. They seem to say with pride: 'We are moving! We are jumping! The children see it and think the potatoes, egg-plant and the rice are alive and they jump that way. But the elders, who know, explain to the children that the vegetables and the rice are not alive: they jump not of themselves, but because of the fire under the pot; if you remove the burning wood from the hearth, then they will move no more. Likewise the price (ego) of man, that he is the doer, springs from ignorance. Men are powerful because of the power of God. All becomes quiet when that burning wood is taken away. The puppets dance well on the stage when pulled by a wire, but they cannot move when the wire snaps." (Gospel, page 891/93).

Sri Ramakrishna firmly believed that: "Whether you live in the world or renounce it, everything depends upon the will of Rama (God) Throwing your whole responsibility upon God, do your work in the world". As an illustration he told his devotees: "In a certain village there lived a weaver- He was a very pious soul. Everyone trusted him and loved him. He used to sell his good in the market-place When a customer asked him the price of the cloth, the weaver would say "By the will of Rama the price of the yarn is one rupee and the labour four annas. By the will of Rama the profit is two annas The price of the cloth, by the will of Rama, is one rupee and six annas." Such was the people's faith in the weaver that the customer would at once pay the price and take the cloth. The weaver was a real devotee of God. After finishing his supper in the evening, he would spend long hours in the worship hall meditating on God and chanting His name and glories. Now, late one night the weaver couldn't sleep. He was sitting in the worship hall, smoking, now and then, when a band of robbers happened to pass that way. They wanted a man to carry their goods and said to the weaver: "Come with us." 50 saying, they led him off by the hand. After committing a robbery



in a house, they put a load of things on the weaver's head commanding him to carry them. Suddenly the police arrived and the robbers ran away. But the weaver, with his load, was arrested. He was kept in the lock- up for the night. Next day he was brought before the magistrate for trial. The villagers learnt what had happened and came to the court. They said to the magistrate, "Your Honour, this man could never commit robbery." Thereupon the magistrate asked the weaver to make his statement.

The weaver said: "Your Honour, by the will of Rama, I finished my meal at night. Then by the will of Rama I was sitting in the worship hall. It was quite late at night by the will of Rama. By the will of Rama I had been thinking of God and chanting His name and glories, when by the will of Rama a band of robbers passed that way. By the will of Rama they dragged me with them; by the will of Rama they committed a robbery in a house: and by the will of Rama they put a load on my head. Just then by the will of Rama I was arrested. Then by the will of Rama the police kept me in the lock-up for the night, and this morning by the will of Rama I have been brought before Your Honour." The magistrate realized that the weaver was a pious man and order his release. On his way home the weaver said to his friends, "By the will of Rama I have been released." (Tales and Parables of Ramakrishna, page 110).

Next to the act of supreme surrender to God comes the act of surrender to one's masters or gurus; in this aspect also Sufis are slightly different and distinct from the general practise of Islam, infact to any other organised and collective religion. It is said that once when a man sought some spiritual advice from the greatest women saints of Islam, Rabiah, by saying that he has not sinned for twenty years: she immediately replied: "Alas my son, thine existence is a sin wherewith no other than sin may be compared." One can see how with these few words she was able to declare

that any law, morality or practical theology can be thrown out to the wind, nothing is greater than God and there is no other parallel existence on Him. Thus it becomes necessary to shoot naked truth like an arrow into the heart of the 'traveller'.

To Swami Vivekananda the person of Guru was of so much respect and regard that he declared that he was ready to do anything to do something for the perpetuation of his 'Guru's' memory. Swami Tapasyananda in his book 'Spiritual Quest' says: "The conception of Guru is that there is only one Guru for all, namely, the Supreme Being who alone can bring spiritual enlightenment to an aspirant and that the different human Gurus of whom disciples speak, form only the human media through whom the one Guru of all speaks. Without understanding and accepting this idea, if people speak of 'my Guru' and 'your Guru' individual human beings only, then they violate the fundamental philosophy underlying the Guru doctrine. recognition of this intimate relationship between the conceptions of the Guru and God the practise is to meditate first on the Guru and then merge him mentally in the Ishta (God)". (Page 40)

Dharma is the minimum, by following which one enters into the realm of religion. If it is followed in right spirit and earnestly, not limited to the minimum form, then one can really progress in spirituality says Hinduism. Similarly it is said in Sufism that "The majority (of people) are provided for by a well defined legal (moral/Dharmic) minimum as a gauge of salvation and the responsibility of the jurists and theologians lies in this domain. The mystics of Islam (Sufi) and this no doubt partly due as to why their from proselytising and preaching in the ordinary sense and free standpoint, as much as to say 'take Sufism as it is most truly and most deeply is or leave it." Sufis firmly believed that: "He that

knoweth God loveth Him: he that knoweth the world abstaineth from it." (Abu Said al-Kharazz - Kitab as- Sida - The Book of Truthfulness) Another Sufi saint has said "Fast from this world and make death thy breakfast and flee from men as thou wouldst flee from beasts of prey" (Qushayri: Risalah.)

According to Sri Ramakrishna the "world is like an overcast sky that steadily pours down rain, the face of the sun is seldom seen. There is mostly suffering in the world. On account of the cloud of 'woman and gold' one cannot see the world. What is there to enjoy in the world? Woman and gold? That is only a momentory pleasure. One moment it exists and the next moment it disappears." (Gospel page 793) Then how to abstain as Abu Said al-Kharazz advises? The Master told: "Give up worldly talk altogether. Don't talk about anything whatever but God. If you see a worldly person coming near you, leave the place before he arrives. You have spent your whole life in the world. You have seen that it is all hollow. Isn't that so? God alone is Substance and all else is illusory. God alone is real, and all else has only a two-days existence. What is there in the world? The world is like a pickled hog plum: one craves for it. But what is there in a hog plum? only skin and pit. And if you eat it you will have colic." (Gospel, page 911)

Naturally, "This means that no one can be called a Sufi in the fullest sense who does not partake of both - both meaning (1) spiritual drunkenness (SUKR) and (2) Spiritual sobriety (SAH'W). Nonetheless it is possible to make a distinction between individual saints according to whether the drunkenness remains entirely inward or whether, by overflowing it sometimes eclipses the outward sobriety." comments Ling in the Book 'WHAT IS SUFISM' page 108. Further according to him: "Whatever the differences between Hasan and Rabiah, their spiritual intoxication does not appear to have been expressly manifested outwardly, and the

same applies to Junayd in an even more marked degree. But it was not the case with Abu Yazid al-Bistami for example: and certain of his inspired ejaculations - like those of Hollej, some fifty year later - provoked much hostility against Sufism on the part of the exoteric authorities. It was Abu Yazzid who exclaimed: 'Glory be to me! How great is My Majesty!' And Hollaj was put to death for saying 'I am the Truth.':

This God 'intoxication' is not exclusive to Sufism or to any one particular religion. It is said that "the divine ecstasy produced in the Master (Sri Ramakrishna) strange results. Sometimes it expressed itself as a total lack of control over the body, so that he reeled and tottered as he walked, like a man under the influence of liquor. It was often mistaken for actual drunkenness. One day, as the Master was walking to Ram Babu's house, he was overcome by some divine idea: his gait became so unsteady, that he had to be supported by two devotees. Some bystanders, who did not know the Master remarked in an audible whisper: 'How dreadfully drunk he is!' Some of the devotees caught the words and said to themselves, Yes, indeed!' Another day, at Dakshineswar, the Master went to the Kali temple and returned from it in a sense of ecstasy, with flushed face and tottering steps. Meeting the Holy Mother he asked her, 'Well, am I drunk?' 'Certainly not,' replied the Holy Mother, 'Then why do I behave like this?' asked the Master again. The Holy Mother answered, You have but tasted the bliss of the Divine Mother!' 'Well said,' he replied, much pleased. (Life of Sri Ramakrishna, page 387)

Sometimes one wonders how mystics and mysticism entered Sufism: for this we have to turn to Ling for he says: "The Sufis had already been on the defensive before this event (the execution of Hallaj)." Because, "The second and the third generations of Islam saw the birth of many heretical sects of different kinds, and the exoteric authorities, who were actually

conscious of the danger of heresy, could by no means always discriminate between a conception of the religion that differed from theirs by way of deviation and one that differed from theirs by way of depth. Moreover it was at this time that the Sufi Orders were beginning to be formed and where groups were concerned, suspicions are liable to be stronger and actions are likely to be taken. The adverse attention attracted towards Sufism by Hallaj's seven month trial and subsequent condemnation was just what the Sufis themselves would have wished to avoid. But whatever its immediate effects may have been, his martyrdom was ultimately to prove a source of strength for the status of mystics and mysticism within the community as a whole." (What is Sufism, page 110).

Writing about this period or a little later, when Sufism had emerged as a distinct body with its own character, A. J. Arberry says: "The 4th/10th century (A.D.) did not lack for individual creative thinkers in Sufism, such as al-Junaid's pupil Abu Bakr al-Shibli of Baghadad (d. 334/946), Abu Bakr al-Wasiti of Farghana (d. 331/942), Muhammad b. 'Abd - al - Jabbar at Naffari (FI 350/961) and Ibn al-Khafif of Shiraz (d.317/982). And amongst all, Arberry mentioned not Yazid or Hallaj that was mentioned very prominently by Ling: 'Of these most curious and interesting figure al-Niffari who left behind him a series of 'revelations' (Kitab-al-Mawaquif and Kitab al-Mukhatabat, quoted by Arberry's Introduction to the History of Sufism) purporting to have been received from God in a state of ecstacy, possibly by automatic writing." However whether these were the utterances noted or just inspired notes nothing could be ascertained for certain. In Hinduism also great importance is given to such 'utterances' and 'revelations'. In fact the Vedics were a series of 'Shravana' messages listened. These messages were conveyed to the disciples by the Masters and they conveyed them to their disciples and this form of conveying and perpetuation of knowledge is supposed to be the earliest method. This ofcourse is definitely prior to the coming of written script, because scripts were not yet discovered then and 'Shruti' in fact is much more authentic and valid since it was heard direct from the Masters where as 'LIPI' or script was liable to be changed if so desired.

In all probablity these messages were received by the Masters while they were experiencing deep ecstasy and then written down when they came down from the realm of that enlightened state either by themselves or by their disciples or devotees. This is exactly so is proved by the advent of Sri Ramakrishna in recent times who used to attain again and again this state of ecstasy. For him any sight, gesture or words connected with Divinity was enough to go into this state: once he went to attend a circus where as soon as he saw a tiger the sight of which brought to his memory the mount of Mother Durga, when he saw a young English youth leaning against a tree he thought of Lord Krishna, a young girl dressed in all finery reminded him of Sita and every time he used to enter into the state of ecstasy. Mahendranath Gupta better known as 'M' who witnessed most of these ecstasies has truthfully and faithfully recorded them for the posterity in the 'GOSPEL OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA' in Bengali. It was there for all to see Sri Ramakrishna getting into an ecstatic mood every now and then and coming down from that highest state, a little later and talking to the people still in an inspiring mood. In the same manner perhaps these messages were broadcasted. These are apparently secondary, but there are also direct kind of revelations. Arberry describes this type of Sufi writings thus: "While these are for the most part brief sentences, composed in general in a highly technical vocabulary and style and require a commentary to be understood, certain passages have an authentic beauty and seem to possess the ring of genuine

mystical experience. The writer pictures himself as standing before God (manquif - a term perhaps originally borrowed from the descriptions of the last Day) in one or other spiritual state and hearing God speaking to him." (SUFISM page 65).

This is more or less in the Gita style. That is to say revelation itself that is revealed through words and scripts, more or less in a semi direct manner. However according to Sri Ramakrishna when a person is in the state of ecstasy it is impossible for him to convey anything. He used to tell his devotees, 'I want to tell you all about this wonderful state, but as soon as I start my throat gets chocked and I am unable to utter a word', description and messages are all a step lower than the state of actual ecstasy itself. The Master also used to cite the example of a person who used to listen to Bhagavata in a temple and used to shed copious tears on listening about God and His glories although he could not understand a word of the language. How was this possible for him to go into such a state without understanding what was being told? May be, without getting into the complexities of the scriptural description, he used to get the picture of the Lord and His Lila directly, may be due to his intense concentration and faith and also the lack of intellectual and conceptional interference as in the case of most of the socalled literate and educated persons who lack the most important ingredient - faith, he was able to get to his Lord. Who can tell? Possibly intuitively such ecstasies can be experienced by the faithful: no rational explanation can explain it.

Arberry quotes Abu - Yazid as saying on this topic: "I saw that my (Yazid's) spirit was borne to the heavens. It looked at nothing and gave no heed, though paradise and hell were displayed to it, for it was freed of phenomena and veils (Maya). Then I became a bird (something like a Parama-hamsa) whose body was of oneness and whose wings were of Everlastingness,

and I continued to fly in the air of the Absolute (in the Vedantic language it can be called as Chida-kasa), until I passed into the sphere of purification and gazed upon the field of Eternity and beheld there the Tree of Oneness". And, "When I looked, I myself was all those, I cried: 'O Lord with my egoism I cannot escape my selfhood. What am I to do?" Swami Vivekananda had some such experience when he met Sri Ramakrishna second time. Let Swamiji (at that time Narendranath Datta) tell about it: "I found him sitting alone on the small bedstead. He was glad to see me and calling me affectionately to his side, made me sit beside him on the bed. But the next moment I found him overcome with a sort of emotion. Muttering something to himself, with his eyes fixed on me slowly drew near me. I thought he might do something queer as on the preceding occasion. But in the twinkling of an eye he placed his right foot on my body. The touch at once gave rise to a novel experience within me. With my eyes open I saw that the walls, and everything in the room, whirled rapidly and vanished into nought, and the whole universe together with my individuality was about to merge in an all-encompassing mysterious Void! I was terribly frightened and thought that I was facing death, for the loss of individuality means nothing short of that. Unable to control myself, I cried out, 'What is this that you are doing to me? I have my parents at home!' He laughed aloud at this and stroking my chest said, 'All right, let it rest now. Everything will come in time!' The wonder of it was that no sooner had he said this than that strange experience of mine vanished. I was myself again and found everything within and without the room as it had been before.All this happened in less time than it takes me to narrate it, but it revolutionised my mind. Amazed, I thought what it could possibly be. It came and went at the mere wish of this wonderful man. I began to question if it were mesmerism of hypnotism. But that was not likely, for these acted only on weak minds, and I prided myself on being just the reverse. I had not

surrendered myself to the stronger personality of the man. Rather I had taken him to be a monomaniac. So what might this sudden transformation of mine be due to? I could not come to any conclusion. It was an engima, I thought, which I had better not attempt to solve......." (LIFE OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA, page 280) Gradually Narendra was transformed for Sri Ramakrishna showed him the way and inspired him to complete his (Sri Ramakrishna's) mission in the years to come.

Almost in the same manner, it is reported that: "God spoke: 'O Abu Yazid, thou must win release from thou-ness by following my Beloved (Se Muhammad). Smear thine eyes with the dust of his feet and follow him continually." (Hujwiri/Opcit, page 238). In the Bhakti cult of the Vaishnavas the vision of one's Beloved God is often spoken with great feeling. Sri Ramakrishna while describing the selfless love of the Gopis for Lord Krishna. remarked with great feeling: "Once this zeal grows in the heart, lust and the other passions disappear. The Gopis of Vrindavan had that state of mind because of their zeal for Krishna Again this zeal for God is compared to collyrium. Radha said to her friends, 'I see Krishna everywhere'. They replied, 'Friend, you have painted your eyes with the collyrium of love, that is why you Krishna everywhere.'Gopis had ecastatic love, unswerving and singleminded devotion to one idea. Do you know the meaning of devotion that is not loyal to one ideal? It is devotion tinged with intellectual knowledge. It makes one feel 'Krishna has become all these. He alone is the Supreme Brahman. He is Rama, Siva and Sakti. But this element of knowledge is not present in ecstatic love of God. Radha was so obesessed for the vision of Krishna we find her telling her friends: 'I have loved to see Krishna from my childhood. My finger-nails are worn off from counting the days on them till I shall see HIM.I have never been able to look at Him to my heart's content and satisfaction. I have only one

pair of eyes, they blink and so hinder my vision. And further on account of streams of tears I could not see enough of my BelovedAfter my death, place my body on a branch of the dark tamala tree and inscribe on my body Krishna's sweet name.: (Gospel pages 206, 228 and 222). It is also said that the yearning for a sight of Krishna was so deep among the Gopis that they mistook some Tamal trees with dark green foliage and barks in the meadow where Krishna used to frolic with them to be Krishna Himself!

It is a proven fact that ecstatic experiences transmute the sense of 'ego' in a person: it replaces 'me' and 'mine' with 'Thee' and 'Thine'. Till this state of 'egolessness' is reached "...the quest for realization unfolds as I and Thou, until the lover attains maturity. Then there is only Thou, Thou, Thou as Lex Hixon says in his book 'GREAT SWAN'. The process of continuous purgation and cleansing should continue till 'I' is replaced by 'Thou' and 'mine' is replaced by 'Thine'. Who else but the narrator of parables par excellence Sri Ramakrishna can illustrate this concept better? He told the scholar Vidyasagar: "Even after the attainment of Knowledge, this 'I-consciousness' comes up, nobody knows from where. You dream of a tiger. Then you awake: but your heart keeps on palpitating! All our suffering is due to this 'I'. The cow cries 'Hamba' which means 'I'. That is why it suffers so much. It is yoked to the plough and made to work in rain and sun. Then it may be killed by the butcher. From the hide shoes are made and also drums, which are mercilessly beaten. Still it does not escape suffering. At last strings are made out of its entrails for the bows used in carding cotton. Then it no longer says 'Hamba! Hamba!' 'l', 'l', but 'Tuhu! Tuhu!', 'Thou'! Thou!' Only then its troubles are over. O Lord I am the servant: Thou art the Master. I am the child; Thou art the Mother." (Gospel, page 195)

Yazid must have been truly united with the 'thine' for he has said: "Once HE raised me up and stationed me before HIM, and said to me 'O Abu Yazid, truly my creation desire to see thee' I said, 'then adorn me in Thy Unity, and clothe me in Thy Selfhood and raise up to Thy Oneness, so that when thy creation see me they will say, we have seen Thee: and Thou wilt see That, and I shall not be there at all." (Surraj, op cit p. 382) And rightly has Arberry commented: "Here we may observe fully developed the doctrine of passing away in God (FANA) which from Abu Yazid's time onwards assumes a central position in the structure of the Sufi theory."

"It was after all not a difficult transition to make from saying that all else but God is nothing (which is the logical outcome of the extreme ascetic teaching that the world is worthless and only God's service is the proper pre-occupation of the believers' heart), to claiming that when self as well as the world has been cast aside the mystic has passed away into God." (Sufism, page 55) he further commented.

Al Niffari's as well as Yazid's style is typically mystic in character when it says: "He stayed with me; and I saw the acts, every one of them, to be evil. And I saw fear holding sway over Hope; and I saw riches turned to fire and cleaving to the fire: and I saw poverty an adversary adducing proofs; and I saw everything, that it had no power over any other thing; I saw this world to be delusion and I saw heavens to be a deception. And I cried out: 'O Knowledge!' and it answered me not. Then I cried out, 'O Gnosis!'; and it answered me not. And I saw everythingevery created thing, that it had fled from me; and I remained alone. And the act came to me and I saw in it secret imagination and the secret past was that which persisted and naught availed me, save the Mercy of my Lord." Are not these the echoes of some of the Upanishadic messages?

And it continues further bearing great resemblance to some of the Hindu mantras on Fire in the Vedic spiritual culture: "And HE said to me, 'where is Thy Knowledge?' And I saw the Fire. And He said to me 'where is thy act?' and I saw Fire. And he said to me, 'Where is thy Gnosis?' And I saw the Fire. And HE unveiled for me His Gnoses of uniqueness and the Fire died down. And he said to me 'I am thy Gnosis'. And I spoke. He said to me, 'I am thy sukr'. And I went forth." (Neffari, Mawqif).

Lord Krishna also assured Arjuna who was torn between duty and love to his kith and kin when he advised him: "Seek refuge in HIM alone with all your heart, O Bharata. By His grace you will gain Supreme Peace and the Eternal abode Fix your mind on Me: be devoted to Me: sacrifice to Me: prostrate before Me: so shall you come to Me. This is My pledge to you, for you are dear to Me" (Gita Slokas 62 and 65)

The beauty of Sufism lies in the combination of mystic experiences and flowery language, the language of heart. Another Egyptian Sufi-mystic was Dhu-l-Nun (246/861 A.D.) has spoken of this unity which is an eloquent synthesis of nature and God in almost Vedic fashion when he said: "O God, I never hearken to the voices of the beasts or the rustle of the trees, the splashing of waters or the song of birds, the whistling of the wind or the rumble of the thunder but I sense in them a testimony to Thy Unity (WAHDANIYA) and proof of Thy Incomparableness; that Thou art the All pervading, the All-Knowing the All--wise, the All- just, the injustice nor lying. O God, I acknowledge Thee in the proof of Thy thy Satisfaction with my satisfaction, and the Delight of a Father tranquility and firm resolve."

Sri Ramakrishna also once said: "Who can know Iswara in His entirety? That power and privilege are not given to us. Again it is not necessary that we know His infinitude. As our understanding permits, it is enough if we know Him alone to be Real. Let it be supposed that one wants to see the Ganges and have a holy dip in it. Plodding along from Gangotri to gangasagar, that is from its source to the estuary, need not to be gone through. Contact with this sacred river at any convenient spot serves this purpose." (Gospel)

These writings (Sufis) are not and cannot be classified as doctrinal as many of these are inspired writing and most of them are backed by spiritual experiences and background. As Abu Talib al-Makki writes in Qut-al-Qubub I: ""They (Sufis) used to receive the instructions one from the other and preserved it carefully, because their hearts were clear of doubts, free from worldly preoccupations and unsullied by passion: because their purpose was lofty, their resolution strong and their intention excellent. Then, after the year 200, and when three centuries had elapsed, in this deplorable fourth century the compilations on scholastic theology (KALAM), first appeared and the scholastic theologians began to write according to opinion, reason and analogy. Gone now was the instruction ('ilm) of the pious, vanished the intuitive knowledge (MARIFA) of the firm of faith - the teaching of piety, the inspiration of rectitude and belief. So matters have continued to develop down to this present time. Now the scholastic theologians are named gnostics (drifin), the narrators and informants learned though they have no true grounding in religious love nor the appreciation that comes of faith." (Ibid. page 160)

This also confirms with the Hindu view that mere scriptures or scriptural knowledge has very little to do with actual live- experiences in the spiritual world. Such scriptures which are merely doctrinal are not very relevant to the Hindus who are on

the path to attain the highest Truth. It is said that 'Shrutis' are the type that gets top-priority - since these are mostly Truth experienced or availed intuitionally or sometimes through some super-natural process, atleast they are not just academic jargon. One can say that it looks as if Sri Ramakrishna has also joined the band of Sufis when he says: "The path of devotion alone is the religion for this age(Referring to the Brahmo devotees) Yours also is the path of devotion. Blessed you are indeed that you chant the name of Hari and sing the Divine Mother's glories. I like your attitude. You don't call the world a dream, like the non-dualists. You are not Brahmajnanis like them, you are bhaktas, lovers of God. That you speak of Him as a Person is also good. You are devotees, you will certainly realise HIM if you call on HIM with sincerity and earnestness." (Gospel, page 143) On another occasion he comforting Mahendranath Gupta told him: "Yes, there is no hope for a worldly man if he is not sincerely devoted to God. But he has nothing to fear if he remains in the world after realizing God. Nor need a man have any fear whatever of the world if he attains sincere devotion by practising spiritual discipline now and then in solitude. Chaitanya had several householders among his devotees, but they were householders in name only, for they lived unattached to the world." (Ibid, page 126).

What is the experience of a sadhaka who is blessed to get God intoxicated? According to the sage of Dakshineswar: "There (in that state of Divine intoxication or inspired state) reason withers away. God cannot be realized through scholarship. He is beyond the scriptures - the Vedas, Puranas and Tantras. If I see a man with even one book in his hand, I call him rajarshithe brahmarshi has no outer signs whatsoever. Do you know the use of the scriptures? A man once wrote a letter to a relative asking him to send five seers of sweetmeats and a piece of cloth. The

relative received the letter, read it, and remembered about the sweetmeats and the cloth. Then he threw the letter away. There was no further need of it, now all he had to do was to buy the five seers of sweetmeats and the piece of cloth and forward it to the man. Better than reading is hearing, and better than hearing is seeing. One understands the scriptures better by hearing them from the lips of the guru or of a holy man. Then one doesn't have to think about their non- essential part. The great devotee Hanuman said: "Brother, I don't know much about the phase of the moon or the position of the stars. I just contemplate on Rama." (Ibid page 476)

Those who are genuinely interested in progressing in the spiritual field need not be very much scriptural minded. In this respect both the Sufis and Sri Ramakrishna are of the same opinion. In fact according to Sufi Shabistari "As for the saints on" this road before and behind, they each give news of their own stages...... since the language of each is according to his degree of progress, they are hard to be understood by the people." (GULSHAN-i-raz) Ofcourse from the point of view of debaters and from the doctrinal view point - scriptures are necessary. Otherwise they are of little importance as pointed out by Sri Ramakrishna: "Can one find God in the sacred books? By reading the scriptures one may feel at the most that God exists. But God does not reveal Himself to a man unless he himself dives deep. Only after such plunge, after the revelation of God through His Grace, is one's doubt destroyed by mere scriptures and books - what can one achieve with these alone? Nothing can be realized without His Grace.the almanac forecasts the rainfall for the year. You may squeeze the book, but you won't get a drop of water not even a single drop." (Ibid. page 729)

The Sufis stressed the need for a 'Shaykh' (Guru) for the real progress in spiritual path. "Man may seek the fountain of life."

by himself. He may seek to discover the principles of spiritual regeneration through his own efforts. But this endeavour is in vain and will never bear fruit unless the master is present together with the disciple which only he can impart. Without the philosopher's stone no alchemical transformation is possible. Only the power of the shaykh can deliver man from himself - from his carnal soul so as to enable him to behold the Universe as it really is and to rejoin the sea of Universal Existence." (LIVING SUFISM, page 46) Sri Ramakrishna put the whole thing in a very simple style by saying: "Books, scriptures and science appear as mere dirt and straw after the realization of GodThe scriptures contain a mixture of sand and sugar as it were. It is extremely difficult to separate the sugar from the sand. Therefore one should learn the essence of the scriptures from the teacher or from a sadhu. Afterwards what does one care for books' (Gospel, page 543). So what is most important is self realization!

In the beginning Sufism had to face lot of persecution, trials, tribulations, misunderstanding and even martyrdom. Some were martyred even for speaking truth out of their experience which was contrary to the established doctrines here and there. But not for long, as Ling points out: "But whatever its immediate effect may have been, his (HALLAJ's) martyrdom was ultimately to prove a source of strength for the status of the mystics and 'no man has a right to utter such words' has now gradually come the speaker' and the utterance itself is now above all, for an that Hallaj was one of the greatest saints of Islam, while at the not always directly responsible for what they say." (What is

Most religions believe that saints are not responsible for what they say or what they do when they are in an ecstatic mood. It is said that Sri Ramakrishna who was asked by Rani Rasmani to sing some devotional songs went into an ecstatic mood and finding that Rani Rasmani instead of concentrating on the Divine Mother had let her mind to wander and was actually thinking about a civil case scheduled for the next day's hearing, slapped her in the temple itself. Rani Rasmani confessed and sat there with folded hands. He further tells: "When one gets into such a state of mind, one doesn't enjoy any conversation but all about God. I used to weep when I heard people talk about worldly matters". He tells us also that sometimes during this period of god-intoxication it was difficult for him to count the numbers and he felt as if he was possessed by some unknown spirit. Similarly Jesus also could not tolerate and compromise with any scribes, seducers, pharisees and pedlars inside the holy-place.

All said and done, the Holy Book for every religion is a must as Arberry says 'Nevertheless the Book is of primary importance for every faith and religion'. When the Holy Book is so essential for every religion what to say about some of these earlier attempts to construct Sufism _ "That exercised considerable influence" on later thought and writings. Al-Ghazali is one such example: "The pattern of the Qut-al-Qulub is a little reminiscent of that of the standard manuals of religious jurisprudence, with its minute discussions of the ritual practices of Islam which are, however, treated from the mystical standpoint." Like Ghazali, Abu-Nakr al-Kalabadhi (390/1000AD) also dealt upon: "One by one the essential elements of Islamic theology.... and asserts of each in turn was firmly held by the great Sufis." (Arberry - Sufism page 68/69)

Also there was al-Sulami who wrote on the mistakes committed by the Sufis and which is claimed to be the best source

of information concerning the Malamatiya, "an extremist sect who held that the true worship of God is best proved by the contempt in which the devotee is held by his fellow-men: (Note: amongst the Vaishnavists of South India there was some such notion and lot of fighting went on within the sect). On this they justified not only the total neglect of the religious prescriptions of Islam but the commission of the most outrageous sins as testifying to their disregard of human opinion and judgement. This, rather unsavoury development of 'drunken' Sufism achieved wide notoriety in later times and brought the whole movement into disrepute" (SUFISM by Arberry, page 70)

Finally, as Ling has pointed out: "All doctrines are related to the mind: but mystical doctrine, which corresponds to the lore of certainty, is a summons to the mind to transcend itself." But doctrines as such do not mean transcendence. Naturally saintly lives with divine-realizations supplements the doctrinal character of all the established religions. Otherwise, only with the doctrines, religions become soulless. As such Sri Ramakrishna used to give lot of importance to the holy company of saints and holy persons, may be for this purpose only. Without life and experience faith is bound to stagnate and the distance between the doctrine and dogma in that case shortens. Without experience even reason solidifies itself.

THE ASCETIC AND MYSTIC CHARACTER OF SUFISM

The sporadic but natural and inspirational growth of the individualistic Sufis spread here and there and also started consolidating into a sort of an institution through the passing of centuries in different ways. The most vital point which brought most of the Sufis under the aegis of an organisation was no doubt doctrinal in character: there is nothing strange about this, since the same thing has happened in the case of many historic and religious groups all over the world. Doctrines are of great help and importance since they regulate and clear the forest of random ideas and thoughts of various groups and bring in some kind of order thereby helping the emergence of a distinct picture with a consolidated structure of the exact ideas and dogmas of a particular faith. Until this doctrinal consolidation takes place the trees remain mixed up within the forest itself without any distinction of their own.

Before this doctrinal consolidation, at the beginning, Sufism also had undergone the gradual ascetic development during its early stages of growth. Referring to this historical development it has been recorded that: "The far-flung conquests of the first Century of Islam brought immense power and wealth to the hands of men, not of the Prophet's House, who exercised sway over vast territories and in their palaces lived a life of ease and luxury that scandalised simpler souls." At the sametime it is also mentioned that; "Muhammad's immediate companions and followers are pictured in pious legends as innocent of these excesses; despite their position of privilege, they maintained the simple dignity and austerity of habit which they had learned from the Prophet."

Thus quoting from Kharraz, Arberry has pointed out; "When Abu Bakr succeeded to the leadership and the world in its entirety came to him in abasement, he did not lift his head on that account, or make any pretensions; he wore a single garment which he used to pin together so that he was known as the man of two pins. Umar b al-Khattab, who also ruled the world in its entirety, lived on bread and olive oil, his clothes were patched in a dozen places, some of the patches being of leather; and yet there were opened unto him the treassures of Chosroes and Ceasar."

Then "As for Uthman, he was like one of his slaves in dress and appearance, of him it is related that he was seen coming out of one of his gardens with a faggot of firewood on his shoulders, and when questioned on the same he is reported to have said "I wanted to see whether my soul would refuse." So also was the case, 'when Ali succeeded to the rule, he bought a waist band for four dirhams and a shirt for five dirhams; finding the sleeve of his garment too long he went to a cobbler and taking his knife cut off the sleeve level with the tips of his fingers, yet this same man divided the world right and left."

Similar conditions prevailed in India also before the advent of Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Saradananda, author of 'Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master' says: "It was but natural and inevitable that the occupation of India by the West should bring the country. But the influence of the West went further. It produced men and women from time immemorial. As a result, the that the aim of enjoyment is only to renounce it ultimately, was an after death was but a poet's fancy: and that no rule could be more

unjust and unreasonable than that a man should be condemned to remain all his life in the stratum of society where he was born. Coming more and more under the spell of the West, India rejected the ideal of renunciation and self-control, and began to run after worldly pleasures. This attitude brought with it the decay of the ancient system of education and training and there arose atheism love of imitation and lack of self- confidence......." (page 17/18)

So it is inevitable that authority and ascetism in some form or other must be there in the beginning atleast of every religion. All religions must be born out of a kind of negation and otherworldliness, if not toal renunciation. Emphasising this aspect of ascetic growth in Sufism Arberry's remark is: "So the righteous Caliphs appeared to al-Kharraz, the famous mystic of the Third (Muslim Hizira) and ninth century (A.D.): and the report of their holiness was widely accepted." But according to him, "With the succession of the cunning Muawiya (661-80) all was changed, worldly considerations supplanted spiritual aspiration as the basis of the Government: while Muawiya's son and heir Yazid (680-3) was a confirmed drunkard. The transference of the capital from Mecca to Damascus was itself symptomatic of this decline in piety: the enervating effiminancy of Syria replaced the ascetic manliness of Arabia."

Thus "When in due course the extravagant new capital, Bagdad was built on the ruins of the old Persian empire in a land where Arabic was almost a second language, the course of degeneracy was fully run". And it was, "In these circumstances nothing was left to the religiously minded but more and more to withdraw from a society which was obviously on the road to damnation. Many of those who had seen the Prophet were compelled to take this (asceticism), the only way left open to them in their later years to register this horror at corruption in high places." Naturally there were two groups or divisions amongst the

people. One group who did not like these compromises wanted to escape through the old orthodox ascetic way, expecting another realm of perfection elsewhere in Heaven with the Lord-sacrificing their immediate life here, for the mediate Divine hereafter!

In the language of Indian tradition, this way is called 'NIVRITTI' or negation that which enriches life with all sattvic qualities of virtues and values. In Brahminic culture it is more prominent. From the time of the Upanishads till the period of Sri Ramakrishna the emphasis was on this sattvic way which was the main spiritual tradition of India through out. Swami Vivekananda mixed up a little rajasic quality in this tradition. It is not that he was the first to do so, for it was already there. In the very Upanishads this is very much obvious but with the Brahminic view dominating over all other such concepts.

So religion, rather the religious fervour was somewhat divided amongst these Islamic people also occasionally as during its early history. For we find these orthodox faithful people being; "Secure in the conviction of their own righteousness, they did not fear to thunder denunciation and threaten the imminence of Divine punishment; and it became a well approved diversion of puritanical circles to listen to the eloquent Jeremiads of the ancient faithful." It was fortunate that such people were not in the majority amongst the people and their number was steadily declining and was on the wane. Sri Ramakrishna was of the opinion that it is not very easy for people to remain on such a high pitch or scale of renunciation and spirituality and said: "The Jnani gives up his identification with worldly things, discriminating 'Not this, not this'. Only then can he realise Brahman. It is like reaching the roof of a house by leaving the steps behind one by one. But a man cannot live on the roof a long time. He comes down again. In the musical scale there are the notes sa, re, ga, ma, pa, dha,

and ni: but one cannot keep one's voice on 'ni' for a long time" (Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, page 104)

Ofcourse there were Sufis who were exceptions to the puritantical type and Arberry specially mentions such a one: "There was one honourable exception to the rule of Caliphal ungodliness in the person of Umar-b-Abd-al-Aziz (717-20) who is praised not only for his own virtuous conduct but also because he corresponded with al-Hasan al-Basri (d/110/728 AD) an eminent early theologian renowned for his piety and asceticism, who is claimed by the Sufis as one of the first and most distinguished partisans." However Arberry himself has pointed out immediately after this remark that: "The tenor of al-Hasan's message which may be taken as typical of the ascetics of the first age and has in it nothing of the theosophy which developed later...." (SUFISM -The Ascetics: page 33). In general Sufism at this stage seems very dry and a negative type of asceticism born out of moral-fear and ethical considerations having very little of Divine-love or devotion of later day Sufis. Fear, punishment and moral governance of the concept of 'Rta' is as ancient as Vedic literature and it is universally found in the beginning of many a religion.

Al-Hasan's attitude can be had from the correspondence he had with Aziz in which he warns: "Beware of this world with all its wariness; for it is like a snake, smooth to touch, but its venom is deadly. Turn away from whatever delights thee in it, for the little companioning thou wilt have of it; put off from thee its cares, for thou hast seen its sudden chances and knowest for sure that thou shall be parted from it, endure firmly its hardships, for the ease that shall presently be thine. The more it pleases, the more do thou be wary of it; for the man of this world, whenever he feels secure in any pleasure thereof, the world drives him over into some unpleasantness and whenever he attains any part of it and squats him down upon it, the world suddenly turns him upside

down. And again, beware of this world for its hopes are lies, its expectations false; it easefulness is all harshness muddied by its limpidity..... How is the life of a man if he be prudent, dangerous if comfortable, being wary ever of catastrophe, certain of his ultimate fate...." (Abu Nuaim Hilys II page 134-140).

Similar warnings against body-cult (or Deha-tattva) were also given by Jesus Christ, Sankaracharya, Sri Ramakrishna etc. etc. Hasan's description of the soft touch of a poisonous snake is nothing but a significant warning against body-culture or sex which no religious or spiritual teachings can afford to affirm or allow its indulgence. Sri Ramakrishna has spoken again and again against such temptations facing each and every person. Once he reprimanded 'M' on this point by saying: "Don't you hate yourself for dallying with a body which contains only blood, phelgm, filth and excreta? He who contemplates the Lotus Feet of God looks on even the most beautiful woman as mere ash from the cremation ground. To enjoy a body which will not last and which consists of such impure ingredients as intestines bile, flesh and bone! Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" (Ibid. p. 341) The point to be noted is that religion cannot go along with any worldly or bodily pleasure.

Thus it was not Hasan alone who stressed upon the ascetic and austere aspects of life in the search for God, there were quite a few more followers of Sufism and Sufi Movement who shared his views.

Narrating the passage, Sufism followed, Arberry rightly tells: "From Basra and Kufa the ascetic movement spread to all parts of the Islamic world, notably to Khorasan which during the second half of the second/eighth century became an important focus of political and religious activity: it was in Khorasan that the plot was hatched which overthrew the Ummayads and established Abbasid Caliphate." It is also very interesting to note

that at Khorasan Buddhism flourished once and the austerities of these Buddhists left some impact on the people including its Prince Ibrahim b Adham (d160/777 AD). Then thro Syria also he (Prince Adham) came in contact with some Christian anchorites most probably.

It looks as though this Khorasanian School of ascetism continued till the time of Shaqiq (a pupil of Adham) - gradually expanding into a cult upto Hatim al Asamm (232/852 AD). Asamm's foremost doctrine: "Knowledge of self is to know thyself, that thou canst not hurt or advantage and that thou has not the power to do anything at all...." is very similar to the Vedantic message proclaiming 'Know thyself'.

Similarly there were any number of people with ascetic nature compiling some kind of literary works supporting the ascetic way of life. Arberry tells us; "Typical also of the Persian School of asceticism is Abd allah b al-Mubarak of Merv (d/181/797), claimed by the Sufis as one of them, who wrote the book on self denial (KITAB AL-ZUHD) which has survived. It consists of a collection of Hadith relating to abstinence, and is therefore of some importance not only as being the earliest of such specialised collections but also because it shows the ascetic at work assembling evidence in the Prophet's life and preaching to justify his own." (SUFISM page 41). To dwell alone and live alone was the main advice of some of these Sufis and unfortunately a few of them were overwhelmed by extreme pessimism, like the Bish- b al-Harith al-Hafi (Barefoot).

"Meanwhile in Iraq the ascetic movement was similarly striking out in new directions. The violence of Bishr-al-Harith's reaction against society is fully matched by the sentiments of al-Fudail blyad." And a pupil who lived with al-Fudail for thirty years, never saw him laugh or smile, except once." However one wonders whether such asuterity and ascetism is so vital. Although

Sri Ramakrishna advocated a life of austerity and advised his lay devotees to spend atleast sometime everyday in a secluded corner of the house and think about God. He said it is good for people to go away to a nearby forest or quiet place and spend few days away from family and friends. Swami Vivekananda never liked a pessimistic outlook in spiritual life and jokingly remarked that moving about with a long serious face in the name of spiritualism showed signs of spiritual dyspepsia or at the most acute case of melancholy. We are told that Fudail had a saying "If thou hadst known death truly, thou wouldst never have married or desired children." Sri Ramakrishna also remarked that inspite of death and grief people marry and beget children year-in and year after!

History is replete with women mystics like Rabia, the famous woman mystic of Basra (d. 185-801) It is said that when Rabia's hand was sought in marriage by a number of pious men, she rejected them all by saying: "The contract of marriage is for those who have a phenomenal existence. But in my case, there is no such existence for I have ceased to exist and have passed out of self. I exist in God and am altogether HIS. I live in shadow of HIS command. The marriage contract must be asked for, from HIM, not from me." It was this same Rabia who was not only of very ascetic nature but a shining example of love for the Godpure love, for she has said: "O, God! If I worship Thee in fear of hell, push me in hell, and I worship Thee in the hope of Paradise, exclude me from paradise, but if I worship Thee for Thine own sake, withhold not Thine Everlasting Beauty."

"Rabia al Adawiya (d. 801) of Basra is generally credited with having introduced the notion of love for its own sake, love which seeks no reward, the love which became central to Sufism.

Thus in a sense, she is the first mystic in the Islamic traditionLegend recounts that she walked the streets of Basra

carrying water in one hand and a flaming torch in the other and when asked to explain her action, said she would cast the fire into paradise and the water into hell, to extinguish its flames, so that people might learn to love god not in hope of heaven or from fear of hell but for love's own sake. Short poetical sayings attributed to her emphasise this notion: "I will not serve god like a labourer, in expectation of my wages" and "O my Lord, whatever share of the world Thou dost bestow on me, bestow it on Thine enemies, and whatever share of the next world Thou dost give me, give it to Thy friends - Thou art enough for me" This, and another prayer of hers, "If 'Thou...... drive me from Thy door, yet would I not forsake it, for the love that I bear in my heart towards Thee' have been repeated in different forms by Sufis over the centuries. Rabia said that she could not love anyone other than God. She did not marry. Legend relates that she was a vegetarian and that the wild animals did not fear her but sat near her. Later mystics praised her in the highest terms as the type of the true lover and it became common to call an exceptionally woman a second Rabia." (MANUSHI, January-June, 1989).

Similarly in Gujarat there were women poets and saints: according to Sonal Shukla: "The three women poets of Kathiawad and Kutch" whose work "has lived on in oral tradition till today. They have become tegends as powerful women, as saints and as poets. They have survived in oral tradition despite total neglect by established writers and researchers. These three women poets, Gangasati, Toral and Loyal, all sing 'nirgun bhakti, with a touch of Sufism. Sufism came to Saurashtra and Kutch through Sind. All of them sing the glory of the Guru.

But amongst the best of all women Bhaktas and poetesses is Mira Bai, the princess born in Rathor and married to Bhojraj, eldest son of Rana of Marwar. Her songs and poems depict her love to Lord Krishna, who she had chosen as her husband while

very young. Opposition and threats from her in-laws only increased her love to her Beloved. Her entire devotion circled round the notion of love like the Sufis. One of her poems says:

LOVE - do not name it, O innocent one Strange is the path of love - set foot there your body wastes away,

If you desire to love, be ready to give up your head! LOVE - as the moth loves the lamp - revolve round it, surrender your body

LOVE - like the deer hearing the horn - come forth give up your life

LOVE - as the chakor loves the moon, consumes the fiery coals (thinking they are the fragments of the moon)
LOVE - as the fish loves the water - die rather than be parted

LOVE - as the bee loves the lotus - die enclosed within it Mira says, Surrender, your being at Giridhar's lotus feet. Talking about her complete surrender to her Beloved Lord Krishna, Mira Bai sang:

I go to Giridhar's house,

Giridhar is my real lover: I see His beauty and I am allured When night falls I go: and when day breaks I come back Night and day I play with him: I please Him in every way. What he clothes me in, I wear: what he gives I eat He Is my old lover, I can't be without him for a moment Where He wants me to sit, I sit, If He sells me, I will be sold Mira's Lord is Giridhar Nagar: I make myself an offering to him again and again.

(MANUSHI, January-June, 1989)

Now coming back to the spread of Sufism, Sufi type of asceticism spread in Arabia, Iraq, Syria, Khorasan and in many other places in the Islamic and Non-Islamic world. Unfortunately "Asceticism for its own sake tends to become a rather joyless and negative attitude to the universe: however when warmed by spiritual emotion it converts itself into an ardent fervour rejoicing in hardship and delighting in ecastatic experience: subjected to

the scorching light of speculative reason, it is transformed into hard discipline that is the necessary prelude to a proved theosophy." And according to Arberry, "This final development took place at Baghadad which now became the most important centre of Sufism as it had also come to be the focus of literature, theology, law and philosophy."

And this also happened to be the period when open discussions and debates on spiritual and religious matters were held frequently between the Muslims and the Christians. Although it was of a short duration it proved to be a period of splendid tolerance that enlivened the Abbasid court. The translation of works of great thinkers and philosophers like Plato, Aristotle and later Greek philosophers into Ababic played an important part in stimulating this transition. The Doctrine of the Divine Unity (TUHID)" exercised the minds of the learned and religious increasingly, as the contest between the creeds and sects became keener, so that, it is scarcely surprising that Sufis should also have evolved their own interpretation of this crucial point in Islamic theology." (Sufism, by Arberry, page 46). From such an interpretation, analysis and characterisation, the unpublished manuscript of 'WASAYA' indicates that there were seventy or more sects: of these, only one deals of the way of salvation. The same WASAYA' also states that due to divergencies of interpretation 'many (of these sects) had been drowned, but a small band escaped therefrom' and that amongst them, each and 'every party of them asserting that salvation was to be found in following them and that he would perish who would oppose them!'

"WASAYA' was very eloquent of these haphazard growth and development; there is nothing strange in 'WASAYA' striking such a dis-satisfied note for possibly every religious history repeats the same story of sects and heretic growth in different directions. Commenting on this trend of each and everyone

claiming religious and spiritual knowledge and their right to speak to the people from the pulpit thereby creating confusion and discord WASAYA' observed: "Some make a show to be like them that know, but are in love with the present world, and prefer it, Some carry an uncertain knowledge of the other world, but with that knowledge seek after respect and elevation obtaining through their other worldliness and worldly goods. Some carry a knowledge, but know not the interpretation of that knowledge. Some make a show to be like the godly and to resemble the good folk, only they lack in penetration and their judgement cannot be trusted." Similarly Jesus Christ said: "Beware of the doctors of the law, who love to walk up and down in long robes, receiving respectful greetings in the street: and to have the chief seats in synagogues and places of honour at feasts. These are the men who eat up the property of widows while they say long prayers for appearance' and they will receive the severest sentence." (WAY TO GOD, by Swami Lokeswarananda, Ramakrishna, Mission Institute of Culture, page 111). Sri Ramakrishna who considered God alone as the best teacher said once: "There is no harm in teaching others if the preacher has a commision from the Lord. Nobody can confound a preacher who teaches people after having received the command of God, Getting a ray of light from the goddess of learning a man becomes so powerful that before him big scholars seem mere earthworms. There is no teacher except Sachidananda. There is no refuge except HIM. He alone is the Ferryman to take one across the ocean of the world." (Ibid, page 117) The Caitanya Caritamrta states: To teach religion, you yourself must be religious. This is the conclusion of the Gita and the Bhagavata." "If we ourselves do not live righteously, how can we teach others? We must know and understand the truth and apply it to our own lives. Then we can teach others: mere lip-service is worthless". This is also the reason why Sri Ramakrishna trusted always the authentic character of the person

who had some experience and upon whom God had bestowed the Divine mission of carrying out the work in right earnest. Lord deputes a particular person to execute a pre-determined job and that person alone should do that job: no-body else.

It is because, at sometime some people who have wrong notions of religion and spirituality act contrary to this that the history is littered with much confusions and bogus purposes and about which 'WASAYA' has aptly stated: "Some possess intellect and intelligence, but are lacking in piety and goodness. Some secretly conform with their desires being ambitious for worldly gain and seeking to be rulers of men. Some are devils in human form: 'they turn their faces from the world to come and rush madly after this world, greedy to collect it, avid of enrichment in it: reports say that they live, but in truth they are dead: with them virtue becomes an abomination and evil-doing a virtue."

Since Kitab al-Wasaya was mostly autobiographical in nature the statements and comments made therein happens to be generally personal and historical and which furnish some clues to the wilderness and confusion existing at that time in these sects just like in any other contemporary religious movement and which could be to some extent be pacified by the advent of a genuine spiritual giant alone. Referring to most of these socalled spiritual men 'WASAYA' tells us: "In all these classes of men I sought for my aim but could not find it. Then I sought out the guidance of them that were rightly guided, looking for rectitude, truth and guidance. I looked to knowledge for direction, thinking deeply and considering long. Then it was made clear to me from God's Book, and the Prophet's practice and the consensus of believers, that the pursuit of desires blinds to right direction, and leads astray from Truth, causing one to abide along in blindness. So I began to expel desires from my heart."

However it is not made clear here 'how to expel desires from (the) heart'. But the presence of the word 'pause' that has been used so prominently in the description gives some clue, that in order to 'free' oneself from the entanglement of various desires. one has to 'pause', 'stop' and finally give up all that are unnecessary for the achievement of spiritual goal and stop running hither and thither in pursuit of the same. Here the word 'pause' has also another significant meaning; it means the quietening of the mind from the tumult of inumerable desires and the tension thereby created. So it is said: "I passed before the divergences of the community, ardently seeking the party of salvation, and anxiously avoiding fatal schisms and sects bound for ruin: for I feared that I might die before finding the lightI therefore sought from among the community men such as these, that I might follow in their footsteps and acquire knowledge from them and I saw that they were exceedingly few, and that their knowledge was utterly swept away: as the Prophet said, 'Islam came a stranger and shall return a stranger as it began. Great then was my trouble, when I could not find god-fearing men to be my guides...."

Swami Vivekananda said that learning does not mean acquiring information: it does not consist in the accumulation of facts. If that were the case, then encyclopaedias would be the greatest scholars, and libraries would be sages. What is essential is the one idea dominate our minds to such an extent that we become immersed in it. In this way our behaviour will be completely attuned to that one great idea: we will not be able to behave in a contradictory way, even by mistake."

Sufis also believed in such significant factors like the importance of the guidance of a guru and the pupil-teacher relationship in spiritual life like the rishis and gurus of ancient India. In the then social and religious circumstances which looked

almost despairing, 'WASAYA' was able to shed light on the path to true spiritualism for it says: "Then the Merciful God gave me to know a people in whom I found my godfearing guides, models of piety that preferred the world to come above this world. They ever counselled patience in hardship and adversity, acquisence in fate and gratitude for blessings received: they sought to win men to a love of God..." So goes on the graphic description given by WASAYA' regarding the spiritual progress of these men of Godbeginning with austerity and passing through some of the mystique experiences of the inner world. But these men were very few and far between who were blessed with some revelation of the soul and mystique experience.

Struggling to arise out of the quagmire of dearth of purity, austerity and to a certain extent mystic qualities, Sufism somehow managed to suface once again with the advent of the notion of God-love, this time no doubt with definite good intention and purpose. Sadly even this path of God-love gradually turned into a sort of profanity without much stress on Divinity; it looked as if its prime purpose was to become very popular and attract the common man into its fold. Strangely this happened along with the processing of growth and expansion. Strange, because: "Otherwise, the mystical movement in Islam sprang as we have seen out of asceticism and was represented in its earliest phase by the personalities of individual men and women who whether in town or desert - but specially in desert devoted themselves singly and exclusively to the service of God and joyous experience of HIS grace. This period was followed by an age in which theory went hand in hand with practice, and famous Shaikhs, themselves holymen, taught the nascent doctrine of Sufism to disciples either solitary or in groups..... The relation of teacher and pupil familiar to the disciplines, presently developed into a characteristic Sufi counterpart of elder (Shaikh, Pir) and disciple 'murid', 'Shagrid':

and covenants were formed and founded and endowed where a celebrated saint would reside with a group of his followers, who studied under him and worshipped for a shorter or a longer period." (Sufism, Arberry, page 85). This feature resembles the Guru-kula system to some extent atleast. Swami Vivekananda said: "Nothing, I say, can be done without the chain of discipleship. that is, the power that is transmitted from the Guru to the disciple and from him to his disciple and so on. Without an unbroken chain of discipleship- GURUPARAMPARA, nothing can be done." And what kind of Guru he should be? Swamiji answers: "The Guru must be a man who has known, has actually realised the Divine truth, has perceived himself as the spirit. Only the knowers of Brahman are the spiritual teachers of mankind. Find such a teacher, serve him as a child, open your heart to his influence, see in him God manifested." (Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda).

Regarding the atmosphere prevailing in a convent it is said that "It is important to remark that residence in a Sufi convent by no means implied celebacy and most of the famous Muslims mystics are known to have been married. So they interpreted the tradition ascribed to Mohummad, 'No monkery (rahbaniya) in Islam'." So it can be seen that Sufism gradually tilted towards the main stream of Islam in this respect. Similarly Sri Ramakrishna personally was not very much keen on the monastic life - except in some exceptional cases. He often remarked: "I tell people that there is nothing wrong in the life of the world. But they must live in the world as a maidservant lives in her master's house..... Then I say to those who visit me: 'Why don't you live in the world? There is no harm in that. But always keep your mind on God. Know for certain that house, family and property are not yours. They are God's. Your real home is in God." (Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna). Even Gita says: "He who works renouncing attachment, offering

his actions to Brahman, remains unstained by sin - even as the lotus leaf remains untouched by water." (Chap. V. Sloka 10)

Mystics are not ascetics, not necessarily always. However, few of them perhaps were ascetics in character, in their personal life and habits. Sri Ramakrishna himself in his personal life was not that ascetic neither was he an ordinary mystique either. He was a messenger, a carrier, a vehicle of what the Dharma and the scriptures said. Almost like a model - that can be called as an autochthonus revival from the deep bottom to the surface of all the spiritual traditions, which in the language of Isherwood "an event that can be called 'epi-phenomena'". According to Sri Ramakrishna mystics are all not messengers or prohets. Though mystics are with revelation, their capacity to serve and guide others in their search for salvation cannot be said to be that ensuring. He compares mystics to smaller planks of wood, smaller than the big floats, which are capable of carrying light things whereas messengers are like a big-float aptly termed as 'Bahaduri- Kath' by Sri Ramakrishna which is capable of carrying many people and heavy luggage etc. Mostly these messengers are God-appointed persons sent with divine message and purpose and not at all moulded and shaped by the world and its experiences.

In this respect although Sufis had many mystics, they had practically no messengerr or prophet to be called their own except Mohummad. Messengers or prophets are the maximal manifestations of God here on this earth. Whereas compared to the prophets the mystics are minimal characterizations rather reflections of the life that is spiritual. Messengers are the agents whereas mystics are just souls who have filled their own cups, so to say.

Ling gives a very apt illustration: "On one occasion after the death of Muhammad when his favourite wife was asked what

he was like, she replied: 'His nature was as the Quran'. This must be taken to mean that from her intense and intimate experience of the Prophet, she formed the impression that he was an incarnation of the revealed Book." Sri Sarada Devi, wife of Sri Ramakrishna while in a reminiscent mood said about her husband: "How fine his teachings were! What a great soul was born! How many people are illumined by his words! He was the embodiment of Bliss itself. All the twentyfour hours of the day were devoted to devotional music, merriment, laughter, teaching and story telling. So far as I remember, I never saw him worried by anything. Often he would tell me nice words of advice. If I had known how to write, I would have noted them down...." On another occasion she said: "Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'A monk must be always alert and careful' A monk is like a bleached cloth, and the householder is like a black one. One does not notice the spots in a black cloth so much, but even a drop of ink looks so prominent on white linen. The monk's life is always beset with dangers. The whole world is engrossed in lust and gold. The monk must always renunciation and dispassion." Recollecting affectionate Sri Ramakrishna was towards her she once said: "Ah! How kindly Sri Ramakrishna treated me! Not even one day did he utter a word to wound my feelings." Holy Mother had imbibed the spiritual qualities of her husband and she had great reverence to sadhus and monks. Once "...a woman dressed in ochre robe worshipped Mother and placed two rupees near her feet: The Mother said "Goodness! Why should you do that? You have just put on the ochre robe. You have Rudraksha beads on your arm". The Mother asked her about her spiritual teacher. In reply the woman said that she had not been initiated. "Without initiation," exclaimed the Mother," and without any spiritual realization, you have put on this sacred robe. This is not proper for you. The robe you have put on is very holy. I was about to salute you with folded hands. All will bow down at your feet. You must acquire the power

to assimilate the honour". (SRI SARADA DEVI - THE HOLY MOTHER, Swami Tapasyananda, page 268)

Coming back to our subject, Ling is of the opinion that, in view of the analogy between the Message and the Messenger, for the Messenger (rasul) is not only the recipient of the Revealed Message but he also like the Revelation, is 'sent' that is what Rasul means - into this world from Beyond." It is interesting to note that while it is a fact that Sri Ramakrishna was a 'Messenger', even Swami Vivekananda was considered as a messenger from beyond with the special mission to help the work and the mission of Dharma, ofcourse led and guided by his Guru, Sri Ramakrishna. No wonder he carried the Message of his Master to the four corners of the world. Just like Ling says: ".. for the Messenger (rasul) is not only the recipient of the Revealed Message but he also like the Revelation, is 'sent'... into this world from beyond". Sri Ramakrishna had said to Narendra Datta (later Swami Vivekananda) that: 'Today I have given you my all and I am now only a poor fakir, possessing nothing. By this power you will do immense good in the world and not until it is accomplished will you return." Hence forth the Master lived in the disciple - (The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, page 72)

And rightly Ling pointed out: "The Islamic doctrine of the Rasul is ultimately the same as the Hindu doctrine of Avatara, the immediate difference being that the term 'AVTARA' means the 'descent' that is, of the Divinity, whereas the 'Rasul' is defined either as an Archangel or else as a human incarnation of the spirit". After making this difference, Ling stands himself corrected in the very next sentence by saying: "But this difference is one of perspective rather than fact, for the spirit has an uncreated aspect opening onto Divinity as well as the created one." And "The Divinity of the Rasul is veiled by the hierarchy of the spiritual degrees which mark the line of his descent, and the purpose of

this veiling is to safeguard the doctrine of the Divine Oneness whereas in the case of Avatars the same hierarchy is as it were 'folded up' lest it should blur the identity of self with Self which contributes the essence of the Hindu doctrine of Advaita (Non-duality). This identity is also the essence of Sufism, but the Sufis tend to express it elliptically except as we shall see, in their 'inspired' ejaculations.' (What is Sufism, page 33/34).

Except for the absence of a concept of a 'Messenger' which it could call its own and claim to be an independent one Sufism continued to grow and expand. However Arberry thinks otherwise when he comments: "No doubt a determining factor in the success of this and other similar orders was their faithful adherence to the religious laws and practices of orthodoxy and their strong condemnation of antinomianism and incarnationist tendencies." May be it gathered some strength on the otherhand without having to face any confrontation although in the process it lost some of its independence and originality and also invited the comment: "The Ghunya contains very little that could be possibly be condemned by any but the most extreme 'Puritans', its teaching is firmly based on the Koran and traditions: the religious exercises it recommends are un-objectionable."

With the 6/12th Century comes the foundation of the great Sufi order (Tariua, Lit. 'WAY'). Hitherto the convents had been isolated oasises in the desert of worldly life: the time had come for them to be linked up in a widespread brotherhood of mystics acknowledging a common master and using a common discipline and ritual. A close comparison can be drawn with this and the Ramakrishna Movement which also discarded to some extent the Hindu tradition and the age old rituals in the same way like the Sufis, ofcourse without much deviations from its main cultural and spiritual stream and heritage. This retention to a certain extent of the Hindu tradition by the Ramakrishna Movement places it in an

unique position in contrast to other reformist movements like the Brahmo Samaj etc. which failed to co-ordinate the past and the present from the beginning by discarding everything.

The work of consolidation of the various Sufi convents started with the creation of Quadiri Order, that found followers in numerous parts of Islamic world, including India. "Many of Abd al-quadir's writings, sermons and prayers have been preserved: his most celebrated book, AL-GHUNYA -le-talibi tariq al-haq was for many generations a favourite manual of instruction." Thereafter, the second great order to be constituted was SUHARWARDIYA, so named after Shihab al-Din, Umar b. Abd -Suhrawardi (529-632/1144-1234) This subsequently spread upto Multan and from there upto Bengal. The third order, founded by abd Allah al-Shadhili also known as a al-Shadhili that won a large following in such areas as Tunisia and from there to Alexandria. Subsequently, "The Shadhiliya proved especially successful in Egypt and North Africa generally as well as in Arabia, Syria and elsewhere." This spectacular spread of Shadhiliya may be due to the fact that these Shadhiliyas were banished or about to be banished from one place to another, and in that process managed to spread far and wide. Yet inspite of these frequent banishments from one place to another and the consequent change of places it is commendable that "the prayers of al-Shadhili have been preserved and are used to this day by his followers." Thus "... the Fourth of the great orders, dating from this period originated in Turkey and looks for founder to Jalal-al-Din Rumi (672/1273) the greatest mystical poet of Persia This order achieved a paramount influence in Turkey under the Ottomans and welded great political power: its monasteries were scattered throughout the Ottoman dominions." Further this Order managed to attract the notice of many Westerners as it employed music and dance, a particular kind of whirling and swinging dance

was very much appreciated in worship and festivals and many among the Sufi Dervishes attained a sense of exaltation through music and dance. It is said that Sri Ramakrishna himself was very fond of devotional songs and used to dance in ecstasy and asking his devotees to join the dancing. On one such occasion during the Festival at Panihati celebrated by the Vaishnavas where thousands of the followers of Sri Chaitanya participate in it and its chief features being the singing of the names and glories of God and the dancing of the devotees in religious fervour....Sri Ramakrishna joined the kirtan party of Navadip Goswami and danced, totally forgetting the world. He entered by turn into all the moods of ecstasy. In deep samadhi he stood still, his face radiating a divine glow. In the state of partial consciousness he danced, sometimes gently and sometimes with the vigour of a lion. Again regaining consciousness of the world, he sang himself, leading the chorus. (Gospel page 253) It is sad to note that this practice was given up later by the followers and devotees of the Master.

Coming back to the Orders, one Western has aptly remarked: "Each order is marked by its particular ritual far more than by any discrimination of doctrine", and "these ceremonies called 'DHIKR' - the term originally means 'rememberance' of God - have as their purpose apart from their devotional aspect, the procuring of ecstatic experience: They are incidentally quite pleasant social occasions and serve to knit together the heterogenous elements attending them." Swami Vivekananda also was of the view that "Music is the highest art and to those who understand, is the highest worship."

Arberry throws more light on the subject by saying: "Many other Orders, either original foundations or their schismatic off-shoots, sprang up throughout the Muslim world in the succeeding generations: they are now numbered in their hundreds, and thier

adherents counted in many millions. All have followed a broadly similar pattern. The order is presided over in each age by the successor' (KHALIFA) of the founder and his supremacy is acknowledged by the heads of several different centres. A relatively small number of professional Sufis reside in the lodges established for teaching and worship: the preponderant majority of adherents to the orders are lay brethern, fully engaged in their mundane occupations, who prove their support by attending the ritual performances on the occasions." (SUFISM: The Sufi Order. page 89).

There is nothing novel about this, for this is the pattern followed everywhere, whether it is Sufi or non-Sufi. In the Ramakrishna Order also such patterns of monastic and lay-brotherhood are seen to work in togetherness. Ofcourse Swami Vivekananda, the foremost amongst the disciplies of Sri Ramakrishna, wanted the monasteries to be little more dynamic and participate more in the service-programmes, giving up its age-old pattern of perpetuation and existence as 'Akharas' and Thakurbaris (i.e. age-old monastic pattern). In fact Swami Vivekananda was so much against rituals that he rated them as the kindergartens of religion and pronounced any ritual to be concretised philosophy.

How did these Sufi congregations originate? In the Introductory Chapter of the book 'SUFI RULES FOR NOVICES' (a translation of Kitab Ababd al-Muridan of Abuu-al-Najib-al-Suhrawardi, by M. Milson and published by Hervard University Press, 1975) says: "Sufi congregations were usually formed around some individual Sufi, famous for his extraordinary spiritual gifts, as aspirants came to be instructed by him. This affiliation of a master (Shyakh) with his disciple (Murid) is the nucleus of all Sufi associations." This is very similar to the Hindu practice of gathering around a spiritually enlightened personality usually

called a 'guru' and this circle of aspirants came to be known as a 'mandali' or a 'mandala' in its smallest form when the number of aspirants are limited. Otherwise a grown congregation having larger followers and commanding general accredition in the society is known as 'SAMPRADAYAS'. These are nothing but different sects having their own ideology.

In the same manner, ".. the communal life (i.e. sect-life) of such Sufi groups was centred in the Shayakh's residence, which thus became a Sufi Govenant. "And, "the unmarried members of these Sufi groups used to live in the convent, but those who had families would live with their families and come to the convent for the communal activities." In India also specially amongst the Hindus similar practice is very common. Lay devotees, householders and their families work together with the inmates of the monoasteries and temple in all the functions and worship, specially in collective prayers etc. Ramakrishna Order consisting of Math and Mission follow the same pattern not only during pujas, festivals and celebrations but also during the time of adversity like famine, floods and earthquakes to bring succour to the victims.

Naturally, "in many Sufi groups 'Dhikr assemblies developed into a kind of mystical concern known as 'SAMA' (audition); in these sessions litanies and poems were chanted and ecstatic dancing often took place" -one can say very similar to the Kirtana Mandali and Bhajan Sangh of the Hindus. Here in this connection the significance of the word 'SAMA' is to be noted since this word is very similar to the word 'SAMA' in Sama-Veda representing the Vedic practice of chanting of hymns in a musical manner denoting devotion to the God. Sri Ramakrishna was very fond of this type of devotion to god, he himself being a good singer he was very fond of Narendra (later Swami Vivekananda) who was not only an excellent singer, Kali kirtans being his special

forte, but was also well conversant with several musical instruments.

The most distinguished characteristic of Sufism as against the general Islamic Order was its insistence on an austere and renounced life pattern. Sufis whether they be associated with a convent or itinerant, had to accept the rule of poverty (FAQR). It is one of the primary stations of the Sufi way. The Sufi, or more correctly, the aspirant to Sufism, had to renounce his possessions and occupations. In giving up his source of livlihood, the Sufi showed his trust in God (Tawakkul, which is another one of the stations). By doing so a Sufi completely surrenders himself to God. This life of complete surrender is something like the 'Saranagati or sannyas' amongst the Bhaktas or devotees of the God (i.e. those belonging to Bhakti School). For Sri Ramakrishna the notion of renunciation meant great things. He used to tell" ... no spiritual progress is possible without the renunciation of 'woman and gold' (meaning here lust and greed). A Sannyasi cannot lay things up. If you want to realize God, then you must cultivate intense dispassion. You must renounce immediately what you feel to be standing in your way. You should not put it off till the future."

Like in all other movements both religious and social there were exceptions, for it is said that "To be sure, many were attracted to Sufism who did not accept the rule of poverty to become 'fuquara' (plural of the word fakir). It was customary for such persons to associate themselves with a convent whose Shaykh they admired. They would materially support the convent with donations and be allowed to attend 'dhikr' ceremonies held there. They were so to speak 'lay members' of the Sufi brotherhood." This has some semblance to the later development in the Ramanuja sect in South India. There, the Bangalai and Tengalai are the two wings, one believing in complete surrender (SARANAGATI) and the other accepting such surrender to be last

resort - having no other alternative or offer. This difference exists even today since the fact is, mostly such divisions are everywhere, almost in all the religious orders - one group well versed in scriptures and having discriminatory attitude surrendering themselves to God completely and the other group, more materialistic if one can venture to say so, trying to win over the Lord by offering not only money but also other kinds of patronisations. It is like a bargain amongst this group - I will offer you so much money and you grant me the boon or fulfill this my desire. Mistakenly many people are prepared to undergo agonising self inflictions in a bid to please the Lord. They seem to forget what Lord Krishna told Arjuna on the battlefield:

Sarvadharman parityajya mam ekam saranam vraja aham iva sarvapapehbyo mokshasyami ma sucah. (Renounce all dharmas and take refuge in Me I shall liberate you from all sins: grieve not.) (GITA Chap. 18, Sloka 66)

Sri Ramakrishna was an apt psychoanalyst and that is how he could read and interpret the mind of a householder and the reason for his reply to a query 'Whether I can make an effort to earn more money' from a devotee, "It is permissable to do so to maintain a religious family. You may try to increase your income, but in an honest way. The goal of life is not earning of money, but the service of God. Money is not harmful if it is devoted to the service of God." (Gospel page 114)

No doubt it is extremely difficult to draw the line of demarcation between the two groups i.e. (1) the dedicated, the ascetic and (2) the lay devotees. Perhaps each one shines in his own part In the drama of life but generally a HIndu will place 'NIVRITTI' on the highest plank, to him/her, surrender and renounciation are the ultimate and the highest goals in life. In the other attitudes towards life, a Sufi gave great importance to

surrender and ascetic character, there is no doubt. The Sufis always preferred to sustain these two attitudes under all circumstances as an individual part of their life-exercise. Ling goes further to observe: "Just as the Quoran embraces every aspect of human life, so it was the destiny of Muhammad to penetrate with exceptional versatility into the domain of human experience, both public and private."

Regarding the Sufi notion about 'here' and 'here-after', Ling explains beautifully as follows: "This corresponds to the flow: the earthly plenitude of the Prophet is combined with an extreme sensitivity to the magnetism of the Hereafter; and this combination has left an indelible print on Islam as a whole and in particular on Sufism." Ling also admits that prophet Muhammad also had some notion of other worldliness in His message. But "His (Prophet's) other-worldliness needs emphasising in that it has been so much overlooked in the West largely because his historically striking aspect of earthly plentitude - sometimes totally misunderstood as 'wordliness' - has been thought to cotradict it. Whereas the two aspects are, as we have seen complimentary and independent."

This sad state of affairs may be due to the fact that the Islamic religion has not been properly understood by the people since some of the interpreters have failed to be holistic and harmonic in their attitude. Sri Ramakrishna seems to share this view of Ling regarding 'the ebb corresponds to the flow' when he illustrated by narrating the attitude of a house-maid in a rich man's house looking after his children, while her own children stayed back in her house in the village: "A maidservant in the house of a rich man performs all the household duties, but her thoughts are fixed on her own home in her native village. She brings up her master's children, as if they were her own, She even speaks of them as 'my Rama' or 'my Hari': but in her own mind she knows very well that they do not belong to her at all" - that is to say

'hereafter'. The same ideas has been elaborated by his disciple Swami Vivekananda in a more complimentary way since he combined both 'here' and 'hereafter' in an unique manner by clubbing together the ideals of (1) service to this world and (2) liberation of the self. Further he desired that his people to be equally deft and perfect in both. One is perhaps, not that contradictory with that of the other, provided one knows the secret of connection between God and His world or creation.

Regarding ones attitude towards 'here' and 'hereafter' Ling prefers to quote the well-known saying of the Prophet: "Do for this world as if thou wert to live a thousand years and for the next as if thou wert to die tomorrow." On the one hand it enjoins the perfection - the patient thoroughness we might say incumbent upon man as representative of god on earth: and on the other hand it demands that he shall be ready to leave this world at a moment's notice. Swami Vivekananda proclaimed that the monastics in particular should consider themselves and behave as the true representatives of Sri Ramakrishna and discharge their duties par excellence in the Monastic Rules he framed. As such it will combine the excellence and perfection with dedication also.

Explaining further the Sufi attitude on this subject Ling says: "Both injunctions are with a view to nothing but the will to Heaven: and in the light of the second it is clear that the first must be carried out in a spirit of detachment, for readiness to leave precludes involvement. The Prophet was thus able to say without any inconsistency: "be in this world as a stranger or as a passer-by." Sri Ramakrishna used to say often: "I tell people that there is nothing wrong in the life of the world. But they must live in the world as a maidservant lives in her master's house.....Why don't you live in the world? There is no harm in that. But always keep your mind on God. Know for certain that house, family and

property are not yours. They are God's. Your real home is in God. Also I ask them to pray with a longing heart for love of God's Lotus feet." (Gospel page 457)

Whoever is in quest for spiritual ascendency, he/she has to adhere to some conventions: the same applies to Sufis and according to Ling: "To the present day, one of the most immediately striking features of the Islamic community is what might be called the 'direction-consciousness.' This spiritual asset, inextricably bound up as it is with the consciousness of being 'for God' is also no doubt a providential compensation and it applies in particular to the Sufi, who, in addition to being more dedicated and more 'path-minded' than the rest of his community has not only to pray like them the ritual prayers in the direction of Mecca but has to perform many other rites for which he prefers to face the same way, so that this outward or symbolic 'concentration' may serve as a support for inward concentration."

Similar to the idea of the liberation of Self, this 'direction consciousness' of all life here in this world, has been explained by Ling: "Since man is in exile, a spiritual centre will be more powerfully symbolic of home if it is not immediately accessible.....And man is primarily an exile by reason of his fall from paradise. Two home comings have therefore to be made and it was doubtless on account of man's secondary exile that on the NIght journey the Prophet was first transported 'horizontally' from Mecca to Jerusalem before he made his 'vertical' ascent so that His journey might be a more perfect proto-type of the Path that had to be followed by the foremost of His people." Naturally this is not for the ordinary and common man.

Then, what is the most suitable direction? Ling explains in detail: "We have already seen that the ideal is 'earthly plenitude' combined with 'readiness to leave' and it is to this perfection, poised between the flood and ebb, that the initial aspiration of the

mystic must be directed. This is like this: The Divine Messenger enters and leaves this world by celestial gate towards which all mysticism is oriented. But the mystic himself, like other men, has entered this world through a gate that is merely Cosmic. (Note: Hindus will say that this depends on one's karma: karmic, by virtue of one's karma. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: "The thing is that everyone must reap the result of his past karma. One must admit the influence of tendencies inherited from the past births and the result of the prarabdha karma") and to avoid ebbing back through such a gate, his little individual wave of entry must reach the culminating point of the great wave in order that its own relatively feeble current may be overpowered by the great current (Cosmic) and drawn along with it." (Ibid p. 38)

The initiation process is very similar to that of the Hinduism: It can be called even parallel of Guru-Vada that helps in this pulling-up of the Karmic-chain with the intense training given by the Guru (Master). This shaking off of the bondage actually and virtually depends on many other factors, including the Divine Grace. According to Sri Ramakrishna getting divine grace is not very easy. He used to say".....But is this process easy or automatic? A beggar may get a penny from you immediately upon asking, but what if he requests first-class train fare from the north to south of India? There is butter in milk, but one must patiently churn the milk to release it. There is oil in mustard seed but one must gather the tiny seeds and place them under great pressure extract this nourishing substance....Although Divine Grace is omnipresent, to receive and this Grace takes more effort and skill than churning butter, pressing oil etc." (GREAT SWAN, page 297)

Coming back to the topic of Sufi initiation: "Every Sufi Order (TARIQAH) is descended from the Prophet and initiation into Tariquah means attachment to its particular chain." What

happens after this proocess is undergone? Attachment to the spiritual chain gives the initiate not only the means of preventing his own ebb going back in the direction from which he came, but also the means of advancing along the spiritual path if he is qualified to 'travel'. The pull of the chain infinitely transcends the efforts of the traveller which are necessary to bring it into operation. At the same time there is a warning note which says: "Even the novice must aspire to the ascent (meaning not only the Guru/Master) though he must remain alertly aware of the short-comings that for the moment prevent this aspiration from being realised." Great importance is given to (Guru/Master) for it is said: "We must also remember that although the chain traces a historical and therefore 'horizontal' line back to the Prophet whose earthly perfection is the sole basis for the ascent, that perfection is brought within the orbit of the disciple in the person of the Shaykh who is already at the centre, already submerged in the nature of the Prophet and already assimilated." (lbid. p. 40).

Actually the fact is that the aspirant and his Guru, ultimately everything merges in the Satchidananda-Guru or God. Once when Girish said." ...I like the form of the Guru. I am not afraid of him. Why should I be so? I am afraid of ecstasy. At the sight of ecstasy I run away" Ramakrishna explained to him: "Look, He who is the Ishta appears in the form of the Guru When he obtains the vision of his chosen Ideal, it is really the guru who appears to him and says: 'This is that', that is to say, he points out to the disciple his Ishta. Uttering these words the Guru disappears into the form of the Ishta. The disciple no longer sees the Guru. In the state of perfect jnana, who is the guru and who is the sishya? That creates a very difficult situation, there the teacher and the disciple do not see each other'. The further you advance the more you will realize that God alone has become everything. He alone

does everything. He alone is the Guru and He alone is the Ishta. He alone gives knowledge and devotion. (Gospel page 843) He further advises: "Remain dedicated to the guide and spiritual friend you genuinely respect and adore, enjoying full knowledge that this human person is simply the liberative art of the Divine Power. The particular aspect of Divinity you are approaching under the patient guidance of the Guru is, in turn, simply the liberative art of nondual Reality. The guru is the golden thread which, followed carefully through the complex tapestry of your life, leads to God, the weaver of this tapestry. Before accepting him, observe and test the Guru by day and by night. Then once you are satisfied, take the firm attitude" to follow him for he is the boundless reservoir of Divine Bliss. (Great Swan, page 268).

Talking about the efficacy of the role of the Guru in awakening the spiritual feeling Sri Ramakrishna said: "Some think: 'Oh, I am a bound soul. I shall never acquire knowledge and devotion.' But if one receives the guru's grace, one has nothing to fear. Once a tigress attacked a flock of goats. As she sprang on her prey, she gave birth to a cub and died. The cub grew up in the company of the goats. The goats ate grass and the cub followed their example. They bleated, the cub bleated too. Gradually it grew to be a big tiger. One day another tiger attacked the same flock. It was amazed to see the grass eating tiger. Running after it, the wild tiger at last seized it, whereupon the grass-eating tiger began to bleat. The wild tiger dragged it to the water and said: 'Look at your face in the water. It is just like mine. Here is a little meat eat it.' Saying this, it thrust some meat into its mouth. But the grass-eating tiger would not swallow it and began to bleat again. Gradually, however, it got the taste for blood and came to relish the meat. Then the wild tiger (Guru) said: 'Now you see there is no difference between you and me. Come along and follow me into the forest.' So there can be no fear if the Guru;s

grace descends on one. He will let you know who you are and what your real nature is!" (Gospel page 232). Eulogizing the greatness of the Guru the saint of Dakshineswar said: "It is Satchidananda that comes to us in the form of the Guru. If a man is initiated by the human form, he will not achieve anything, if he regards his guru as a mere man, The guru should be regarded as the direct manifestation of God. Only then can a disciple have faith in the mantra given by the Guru. Once a man has faith he achieves all." (Ibid page 292). Having a guru itself is a 'Kripa' or favour. According to the Sufis, there is some distinction between 'MAQUAM'(station) 'HAL' (state): briefly maquam is a stage of spiritual attainment on piligrim's progress to God which is the result of the mystics' personal effort and endeavour, whereas Hal is a spiritual mood depending not upon the mystic but upon God. "The states are gifts, the stations are earnings" remark's al-Qushairi.

Talking about the presentation of information regarding the aspects of 'maquam' and 'hal' Menaham Milson says: "The emergence of this doctrine of stations and states in the 4th century A.H. must represent extensive effort in collecting, combining, systematizing and to a large extent, synthesizing the teachings of the great mystics of the earlier generations." And "This development appears to have resulted from the need which many Muslims felt to enrich emotionally their religious life. Such a need was experienced not only by the uneducated who were naturally debarred from the intellectual satisfaction that could be derived from the juristic and theological studies, but also by many of the religious scholars (ULAMA) - guardians of the Divine Law of Sharia. Laymen and 'ULAMA'- alike adopted Sufism to satisfy that need "

What is most note worthy about the Sufism is: "It is the inner mystical aspect of religion which is the main concern of the

Sufi rather than the external juristic aspect, the esoteric 'true reality' (haquiga) rather than the exoteric 'sharia! Yet inspite of this their lofty ideal" yet the Sufis did not constitute a sect, with few exceptions they remained within the fold." Sect meaning here a separate sect. May be the Sufis were not allowed to vouschafe and declare this separate identity for various historical and other reasons. According to Milson: "They have always regarded by most other Muslims as part of the orthodox (Sunni) community, a concept which is expressed by the Arabic idiom 'ahl-al-Sunna wa-l-jamaa,' meaning thereby 'those who adhere to the tradition and the community." Infact Sufis themselves liked such compendium "as the most excellent of the Muslim community. who keep their respiration with God and safeguard their heart from the intrusions of heedlessness, have singled themselves out with the name of Sufism: and this name has become famous in reference to these greatmen before the year two hundred A.H." remarked Al-Risala al Qushayriyya. Although Sri Ramakrishna practised Islam according to its prescribed rules under the guidance of one Govinda who engaged himself day and night in practising devotional moods like the dervishes for a short time thinking that "This is also a path to the realization of God" and had great respect for Christianity, he never abjured Hinduism.

SUFISM - ITS INFLUENCE ON SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND SWAMI VIVEKANANDA.

SUFISM - with 'LOVE OF GOD' as its central theme has attracted many personalities in the field of religion and spirituality, No wonder that Sri Ramakrishna and his worthy disciple Swami Vivekananda were duly drawn towards it. We are told by none other than Swami Saradananda, the author RAMAKRISHNA THE GREAT MASTER' that Sri Ramakrishna: "....could not stand intolerance and exclusiveness in religious matters, and he tried in all ways to correct that narrow outlook..... the establishment in the non-dual consciousness had brought the Master's mind to a state of extreme liberality. The Master was ill for a few months after he had reached the zenith of his practice of the non-dual mood. About that time an ardent spiritual aspirant named Govinda Ray, who must have been in search of God for a long time, arrived at Dakshineswar. Hriday told us that he was a Kshatriya by birth. He was perhaps learned in Persian and Arabic. Having studied various religious doctrines and come in contract with different religious communities he was at last attracted by the liberal doctrine of Islam and was formally initiated into it. Govinda, thirsting for truth, accepted the Islamic faith, but we cannot say how far he followed its social manners and customs. But since he became initiated, he, we were told, engaged himself ardently in the reading of the Koran and in the religious practices prescribed by that scripture. Govinda was an ardent lover of God. The method of worshipping God according to the teaching and mental attitude prevalent amongst the Sufis, followers of a sect of Islam seems to have captivated his mind: for he now became engaged day and night in practising devotional moods like the Dervishes, the devotees belonging to that sect. Somehow or other Govinda now came to the Kali temple at Dakshineswar and began to spend his time there with his 'seat' spread under the peaceful shade of

the PanchvatiThe Master was attracted towards the devout Govinda and happened to converse with him, was charmed with Govinda's sincere faith and his love for God. Thus was Master's mind now attracted towards the Islamic religion. 'This also' thought he, 'is a path to the realisation of God: the sportive Mother. the source of infinite Lila, has been blessing many people with the attainment of Her lotus feet through this path also. I must see how people taking refuge in HER are led along this path to the fulfilment of their spiritual aspirations. I shall be initiated by Gobinda and shall engage myself in the practice of that spiritual mood.' Thought was immediately followed by action. The Master expressed his desire to Govinda, and became initiated. He engaged himself in practising Islam according to its prescribed rules. The Master said, 'I then repeated the holy syllable - ALLAH with great devotion, wore cloth like the Muslims, said Namaz thrice daily and felt disinclined even to see Hindu deities, not to speak of saluting them, in as much as the Hindu mode of thought vanished altogether from my mind. I spent three days in that mood and had the full realization of the result of the practice according to that faith." (pages 299/300).



Lex Hixon in his book 'GREAT SWAN' relates how Sri Ramakrishna, "while returning from a visit to Mother Kali at Kalighat, the carriage was moving slowly through the crowd before the Grand Mosque at Geratala. Through the open courtyard I glimpsed a Muslim sage crying out with palms upraised 'O Allah, O Supreme Beloved, please come! Please come!' I leaped from the moving vehicle, raced madly into the mosque and tearfully greeted this noble Sufi. We held each other in a long embrace. The Sufis follow the way of prema, a love so intense that it melts and dissolves the entire being. I was once shown a Persian book which explained the spiritual essence of

the human body - inside the flesh is bone, inside the bone is marrow, inside the marrow are more subtle substances, but the innermost is PREMA. At the core is pure love." (page 255)

Coming to Swami Vivekananda he once told that "there may be times in the lives of sages when the human mind transcends as it were its own limitations, when man goes even beyond nature to the realm of which Shruti declares' whence words fall back with the mind without reaching it' There the human soul transcends all limitations and then and then alone flashes into the human soul the conception of monism: I and the whole universe are one. I and Brahman are one. And this conclusion you will find has not only been reached through knowledge and philosophy, but parts of it through the power of lovethis identity come even through love. There was an ancient Persian Sufi poet and one of his poems says, 'I came to the Beloved and beheld the door was closed. I knocked at the door and from inside a voice came. 'who is there?' I replied, 'I am'. The door did not open. A second time I came and knocked at the door and the same voice asked, 'Who is there?' 'I am so and so'. The door did not open. A third time I came and the same voice asked 'Who is there?' 'I am Thyself, my LOVE', and the door opened.

Going deeper he remarked: "But the way of all ways to realisation is love. When one loves Lord, the whole universe becomes dear to one, because it is all HIS. 'Everything is HIS and HE is my lover: I love HIM' says the Bhakta. In this way everything becomes sacred to the Bhakta because all things are HIS. How then, may we hurt any one? How then, may we not love another? With the love of God will come, as its effect, the love of everyone in the long run. The nearer we approach God, the more do we begin to see that all things abide in HIM. Our heart will become a perennial fountain of love. Man is transformed in the presence of

this Light of Love and realises at last the beautiful and inspiring truth that Lover and the Beloved are really one."

* * * * *

According to him "Light comes to individuals through conscious efforts of the intellect: it comes slowly though to the whole race through unconscious percolation. The philosopher shows the volitioned struggles of great minds: history reveals the silent process of permeation through which truth is absorbed by the masses. Of all the theories that have been held by man about himself, that of a soul entity separate from the body and immortality has been the most widespread and among those that hold the belief in such a soul, the majority of the thoughtful had already believed also in its pre-existence. At present the great portion of the human race having organised religion, believe in it and many of the best thinkers in the most favoured lands though nurtured in religion avidly hostile to every idea of the pre-existence of the soul, have endorsed it. Buddhism has it for the foundation, the educated classes among the Egyptians believed in it: the ancient Persians arrived at it: The Greek philosophers made it the corner stone of their philosophy and the Sufis among the Mohammedans almost universally acknowledged its truth."

"The Atman is the fearless. When we pray to God outside it is good: only we do not know what we do. When we know the Self, we understand. The highest expression of love is unification:"

There was a time when I was a woman and he was a man Still love grew until there was neither he nor I Only I remember faintly there was a time when there were two But love came between and made them one.

(A Persian Sufi poem)

"There are sixtyfive million Mohammedans in India, some of them Sufis. Sufis identify man with God and through them this idea came into Europe. They (Sufis) say: "I am that Truth" but they have an esoteric as well as an exoteric doctrine although Mohammad himself did not hold it. A pitcher of water has to be present in the Mohammadan worship as a symbol of God filling the universe:" (Reminiscent of the Purna Kumbha in Hindu rituals!)

"It was India's Karma, her fate, to be conquered and in her turn to conquer her conquerors. She has already done so with her Mohammedan victors. Educated Mohammedans are the Sufis scarecely to be distinguished from Hindus. Hindu thought has permeated their civilisation, they assumed the position of learners. The great Akbar, the Moghul Emperor, was practically a Hindu. Sufis are hardly to be distinguished from the Hindus, they do not eat beef and in other ways conform to our sages. Their thoughts have become permeated by ours."

(Excerpts from the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda).

APPENDIX - B

TO A FRIEND*

Where darkness is interpreted as light, Where misery passes for happiness, Where disease is pretended to be health, Where the new-born's cry but show 'tis alive; Dost thou, O wise, expect happiness here?

Where war and competition ceaseless run, Even the father turns against the son, Where 'self', 'self' - this always the only note, Dost thou, O Wise, seek for peace supreme here?

A glaring mixture of heaven and hell, Who can fly from this Samsara of Maya? Fastened in the neck with Karma's fetters, Say, where can the slave escape for safety?

The paths of Yoga and of sense-enjoyment,
The life of the householder and Sannyas,
Devotion, worship and earning riches,
Vows, Tyaga, and austerities severe,
I have seen through them all. What have I known?

Have known there's not a jot of happiness, Life is only a cup of Tantalus,** The nobler is your heart, know for certain, The more must be your share of misery.

^{*}This poem composed by Swami Vivekananda has a Sufi flavour as well as his Vedantic view.

^{*}Tantalus - A wealthy king and son of Zeus, was punished in the lower world by being condemned to stand in water up to the chin and beneath fruit-laden branches, with water and fruit receding at each attempt to drink or eat.

Thou large-hearted Lover unselfish, know, There's no room in this sordid world for thee; can a marble figure e'er brook the blow That an iron mass can afford to bear?

Couldst thou be as one inert and abject, Honey-mouthed, but with poison in thy heart, Destitute of truth and worshipping self, Then thou wouldst have a place in the Samsara.

Pledging even life for gaining knowledge, I have devoted half my days on earth -For the sake of love, even as one insane, I have often clutched at shadows lifeless;

For religion, many creeds have I sought, Lived in mountain-caves, on cremation-grounds, By the Ganga and other sacred streams, And how many days have I passed on alms!

Friendless, clad in rags, with no possession, Feeding from door to door on what chance would bring, The frame broken under Tapasya's weight; What riches, ask them, have I earned in life?

Listen, friend, I will speak my heart to thee: I have found in my life this truth supreme -Buffeted by waves, in this whirl of life, There's one ferry that takes across the sea.

Formulas of worship, control of breath,
Science, philosophy, systems varied,
Relingishment, possession, and the like,
All these are but delusions of the mind Love, Love - that's the one thing, the sole treasure.

In Jiva and Brahman, in man and God, In ghosts, and wraiths and spirits, and so forth, In devas, beasts, birds, insects and in worms, This Prema dwells in the heart of them all.

Say, who else is the highest God of gods? Say, who else moves all the universe? The mother dies for her young, robber robs -Both are but the impulse of the same LOVE!

Beyond the ken of human speech and mind, It dwells in weal and woe; 'tis that which comes As the all-powerful, all-destroyer Kali and as the kindliest mother.

Disease, bereavement, pinch of poverty, Dharma, and its opposite Adharma, The results of actions good and bad, all Are but its worship in manifold modes; Say, what does by himself a Jiva do?

Deluded is he who happiness seeks, Lunatic he who misery wishes, Insane he too who fondly longs for death, Immortality - vain aspiration!

Far, far, however far you may travel, Mounted on the brilliant mental car, 'Tis the same ocean of the Samsara, Happiness and misery whirling on.

Listen, O Vihangama* bereft of wings,
'Tis not the way to make good your escape;
Time and again you get blown, and collapse,
Why then attempt what is impossible?

*VIHANGAMA: Bird, here addressed to the bound soul.

Let go your vain reliance to knowledge, Let go your prayers, offerings and strength, For Love selfless is the only resource, Lo, the insects teach, embracing the flame!

The base insect's blind, by beauty charmed, Thy soul is drunken with the wine of Love: O thou Lover true, cast into the fire, All thy dress of self, thy mean selfishness.

Say - comes happiness e'er to a beggar?
What good being object of charity?
Give away, ne'er turn to ask in return,
Should there be the wealth treasured in thy heart.

Aye, born heir to the Infinite thou art, Within the heart is the ocean of Love, 'give', 'Give away' - whoever asks return, His ocean dwindles down to a mere drop.

From highest Brahman to the yonder worm, And to the very minutest atom, Everywhere is the same God, the All-love; Friend, offer mind, soul, body, at their feet.

There are HIS manifold forms before thee, Rejecting them, where seekest thou for God? Who loves all beings, without distinction, He indeed is worshipping best his GOD.

(IN SEARCH OF GOD AND OTHER POEMS: Swami Vivekananda.)

A 'Feed-Back' from an Italian Sadhaka who is not only interested in Saiva and Sri Aurobindo philosophies but also in Sufi-Ramakrishna Sadhana:

...The Guru is indeed present in every tradition. We have the SIFU in China, the LAMA in Tibet, the ROSHI in Japan, the Abbot or Spiritual Director in Christianity, the PIR in Sufism etc. The Guru is revered by all true mystical traditions. Another good point to note is the combination of contemplation and action. The Benedictine monks have this motto: 'ORAET LABORA' - Pray and work. The Lord says in the Gita: 'you must act because I myself am never without action. Every saint has tried to serve humanity and overcome communal differences. It is said that now-a-days certain political manipulators are using the name of Swami Vivekananda in their talks on patriotism and 'Hindurashtra' forgetting that he liked to have food in the house of his Muslim freinds and devotees, while Thakur (Sri Ramakrishna) did Sufi and Christian penance to show the unity of all paths......

I have been particularly stimulated by some ideas expressed on pages 53 & 54 (of Sufi-Rules and the Ramakrishna Way): 'The heart is a splendid place. One can meditate there or in the Sahasrara. But you may meditate wherever you like. Every place is filled with Brahman' - Sri Ramakrishna. Generally speaking, the Sufis, as the Christian Desert Fathers, give prominence to the Heart. In Irina Tweedle's book 'CHASM OF FIRE' it is said that the heart is the King and the other centres are awakened by it. The Upanishads speak of the Heart as the abode of the thumb-sized golden Purusha. Ramana Maharashi

advocated the importance of the Heart, not the physical heart, nor the anahata chakra but a spiritual Heart on the right side of the chest. This does not mean merely emotional center but the root itself of Consciousness. A contemporary American mystic-sage Da Avabhasa wrote:

'The fundamental root of attention is not in the ultimate region of Radiance above the head (The Sahasrar or Yogic mysticism) but in the third and causal region of the Heart to the right side of the chest, if the ego is to be transcended, attention must be eventually be resolved into the causal root of the heart.'

The Sufis also speak of different regions of the Heart and the dhikr is done with a special technique, combined with breathing, repeating the Holy phrase 'la ilaha illa eeah' starting from the physical heart in a rotating fashion (accompanied by the rotation of the head bent on the chest) and culminating with the word 'Allah' in the spiritual Heart. The book of the Russian Pilgrim gives a similar practice.

However, we find that generally in Tantric and Yogic mysticism and in the Kundalini process, the culmination of spiritual experience is in the Sahasrara. Sri Ramakrishna also, who was initiated in the Tantras, had and described the experience of the ascent of the Kundalini energy in a similar way. Above the throat he could not speak and he went into samadhi.

The great Siddha, Nityananda, said that the true heart is in the Sahasrara. I have been repeatedly asking this question to many yogis and sages and they were all very sure about the reply to my query. The problem is that 50% said that the Heart is the abode of the Self: 50% said it is Sahasrara. Sri Ramakrishna, refreshingly tells us: 'meditate wherever you like, Brahman is everywhere.' But the doubt remains: why this discrepancy in the scriptures and in the teachings of the sages.

When on page 54 you say: 'Sri ramakrishna also believed in the ultimate importance of the Heart and the inter-connection of all other limbs you seem to be more on the Sufi side. Mr. Gurdjeff, a Sufi initiate, spoke in the first part of the Century to his disciples of the various centres that have to be harmonised: mechanical centre, instinctive centre, emotional centre and the intellectual centre (heart and head). But he spoke of the development of two superior centres, normally not active in the common man, the higher emotional centre and higher intellectual centre both located in the Heart.

In fact, in the ancient world, the Heart was believed to be the seat of the real intellect, different from the mind. It is only in the modern positivistic thought that intellectual activity is equated to mental activity. This starts with St. Austin and later Western philosophers. The original meaning of 'INTELLECTUS' from the Latin verb 'INTELLEGERE' - to understand, was a faculty of the soul, connected with the Will more than with the mind. The mind itself being only an instrument for organizing and storing thoughts and memories quite passive by itself, lunar in essence (Soma=Mind in Hinduism) while the Intellect is Solar, like the Archetypal Ideas it would grasp.

It would seem indeed that one of the main characteristics of the Kaliyuga would be, more than any moral degeneration (which is a secondary effect) the obscuration and annihilation of the 'Intellect of the Heart,' allowing man to know things from inside, with his Heart. The emergence of the mind as an autonomous entity with rationalism and positivism (started with the Greeks) is the root of materialism and utilitarianism, culminating in the present chaos and lack of values! However, true values and true ethics cannot be presently imposed or proposed to man from the religious background, now obsolete. Religion without the flame of

the Intellect of the Heart has become a source of division instead of being a harmonising factor.

The true and only path, beyond religion and beyond the mind also the sense of rational mind (not intuitive mind or gnostic mind) is to find again that door, the door of the Heart, that was closed by man's arrogance, the arrogance of the mind over the soul.

The only true way of knowing is through the Heart. The mind only thinks and thinks and doubts everything. If the mind does not serve the Heart, the true Intellectus, it will serve the ego and the vital passions like it happens with our present leaders. In any case the myth of a rational solution is uncovered. Through the mind we cannot find a solution: it's either the Heart or the ego.

It's about acceptance. It's a hard school but I guess it-is necessary. I have been reading a very good book about the Sufi Masters of Central Asia, the Khwajagan or 'Masters of Wisdom' (Nagrhbandi Sufis). Heart/Head: great spiritual Masters like Ramakrishna have said that both centres are spiritually important and when one is awakened, the other also automatically follows. Some people confirm that both the centres are equally important and that both are the abode of the SELF. The difference is that in the Heart is found the seat of the Self in the Cosmic level (centre of the body) while the head (and above it) represents supra-cosmic consciousness (PINDANDA/BRAHMANDA).

In Sufism also there is a distinction between Cosmic man and universal man and in Hermetism between 'small mysteries' and 'great mysteries.' The importance of the Heart however is that being in the middle (between heaven and earth) it represents the Cosmic function of man as a mediator. The Chinese tradition also speaks of the 'Great Triad' -TIEN-T-Jen, Heaven, Earth and Man i.e. in which the latter is the mediator between the two. The

Avatara, God becoming man, is the only real man in the sense that he fully accomplishes meditation that brings harmony to the cosmos. Transcending the Cosmos alone is not the only task of man. That is only half of the work, the Ascending Path. The other half is the descending path in which the Divine comes down in His creation to bring 'DHARMA' i.e. Cosmic harmony and peace (peace and justice). The Heart is the symbol of this descent and the symbol of the true man (or real man) who is the middle point between Earth and Heaven, participating in the Essence of Both.

While the Samadhi pertaining to Sahasrara (Nirvikalpa samadhi) is complete transcendence, extracosmic, the samadhi pertaining to the Heart (Saheja-Samadhi) implies integration of both states into one awareness of the world and the awareness of the Divine at the same time as a consequence, irradiation in the world of the Divine influence (action without action; by pure presence).

According to Christianity and Judaism, God made man in His own image. That means man is in itself an image of the Cosmos: a microcosmos. The true realisation of man is becoming what he really is. Reaching the Light above and irradiating it below. Only the Saint is a true man in this sense, because he accomplishes this function by completing the Ascending and Descending paths and establishes himself in the 'Holy Middle' i.e. the Heart.

At the physical level while the brain controls the activity of the body through the nervous system (central and autonomous) it is the heart only that gives life to the whole body, including the brain via the blood (blood = life).

The body can live when the brain does not work (like in a coma) but if the heart stops, the body will die immediately. That is why legally one is considered dead only when the heart stops

even if his brain is already gone, thus leading to many legal controversies as to whether to stop the machine maintaining heart-beat artificially or not.

I have been going through the booklet 'SUF-RULE (GUIDANCE) and THE RAMAKRISHNA WAY (A Comparative Study) and found it instructive and interesting concerning mainly ethics and rules of conduct for aspirants. As usual the exegesis is rich and informative. It will make a very good reading for people involved in comparative religion as well as for sincere seekers. It is laudable that such an effort is made in a time when pseudo-religious forces are manipulating minds and spreading the message of hatred and division in the name of God.

-ALBERTO D. FORMAI.

A Note On The HEART (QALB) AND BRAIN (KNOWLEDGE) CONTROVERSY.

It is said that ".....the heart represents the attainment of annihilation (due to love) for it possesses the character of transformation........ (But) to be the master of the heart means to be master of annihilation......." in the book 'MASTERS OF WISDOM OF CENTRAL ASIA'. But according to Advaitic thought ".... never the socalled enjoyments as the bhaktas think in their ignorance, for the 'nirvana' or 'mukti'."

There is no way to achieve this except through annihilation (FANA) say the Masters of Wisdom. However Advaita says, 'Nanya Pantha Vidyate Aya-Naya.'

Annihilation means (viz. renunciation or the sannyasa) leaving relative-material being to attain the real being of non-existence. It is becoming non-existent....Material existence is relative being, illusory consciousness (Maya/Ajnana). Non-being is real existence, being awake. It is the secret of 'being without' being. Advaita: Naturally the question of creation as Maya (Cosmic) and enjoying this Leela of creation or Maya of God does not arise at all.

Annihilation means, in fact, a heightening of true perception from the limited towards the Pure, from the concrete towards the abstract. Vedanta: Like the Aporaksha Anubhuti, nearly.

In this sense, the stages of annihilation are the same as the degrees of perception, the 'presences' of beingThus it is a process of realization through the discovery and direct experience (Aporaksha). It is hal (state/experience/anubhuti) as opposed to Qal (talk/intellectual conception merely)..... (In fact) the stages of the way of Liberation are attained by direct contemplation and first-hand experience. These stages are:

- (1) Annihilation of Laws (fana al-ahkam) i.e. the corporeal 'presence'. No Samasthi / No society here.
- (2) Annihilation of actions (Fana-al-afal) i.e. the spiritual 'presence' (of forms and concrete actions like the formal rituals etc. Non-action in this sense (Non-obligation).
- (3) Annihilation of Attributes (Fana-al-sifat) i.e. 'Presence' of potentiality.

Guna-Vinashaha i.e. Nirguna ofcourse. Bhagavad Gita says: Traigunya visaya veda nistraigunya bhava Arjuna: nirdvandvah nitya sattvastho niryogaksema atmavan: The Vedas ennumerate the three Gunas. You transcend the three Gunas, O Arjuna. Be free from the pairs of opposites, ever-balanced, unconcerned with getting and keeping and centred in the Self. (Chap. 2. Sloka 45).

(4) Annihilation of the Essence (Fana al-dhat) i.e. the 'presence' of Ipseity (Ipseity meaning the pure identity, the secret of Being, the highest goal).....

Almost like the Atman and Brahman concept.

This is the direct route by which to escape from Cosmic existence. Advaita says it is not namby pamby or emotional 'Love'.

The seeker's first step in annihilation is to leave the corporeal world and reach the realm of Knowledge (Jnana) this is the hardest and longest phase of all. Those who pass through it successfully, achieving realization at the first degree of Conscious death - they gain admittance to the spiritual realm. According to Dwaita which is discursive, the 'objects of Knowledge' are directly perceived at this stage. (Directly here meaning not immediate / Aparoksha).

So.....annihilation of the Essence is the complete cessation of individualizations, illusions and manifestations. It is

called non-individualization, absolute occultation, the secret of existence, the mystery of Ipseity etc......

When the seeker has made sufficient progress in annihilation, he finds himself in permanent non-being. With the complete extinction of the personal self (even as a bhakta) the stages of being are also exhausted. Absolute liberation is attained and realization is consummated..... Therefore, the phase of leading upto annihilation is 'progress towards God'. Progress in God occurs during the various stages of annihilation. The attainment of permanent non-being (Atman-Brahman) is called 'progress beyond God'. This is the beatitude of 'as though it had never been'. Like the Anirvachaniya-Maya of the Vedanta.

'Heyula' (matter) is the vague and defective perception of things or phenomena in incompletely manifest form (illusion).
.......externals are for heedless people: realities are the peculiar property of those who master annihilation and perpetuan non-being. As the Prophetic tradition puts it: 'Ordinary people are asleep and wake up only when they die' Gita says: 'Ya nis sarvabhutanam tasyam jagarti samyami: Yasyam jagrati bhutar sa nisa pasyato muneh' - That which is night to all beings, in the the disciplined man wakes; that in which all beings wake, is night to the Atman-cognizing Muni. (Chap. 2, Sloka 69)

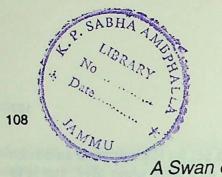
However, to Sri Ramakrishna and many others, certain formal acts of worship are not abandoned by those who have attained the Reality, even though they have transcended succeplifications. It is stated that once Sri Ramakrishna wished to offer oblations with water: however much as he tried he could not retain the water in his hands as it fell through his fingers. These peopare always inwardly in touch with Reality even while performing prescribed duties and obligations. About such people Gita say when a man abandons, O Partha, all the desires of the heart are is satisfied in the Self by the Self, then he is said to be one stab

in wisdom'. (Gita, Chap. 2, Sloka 55) Sri Ramakrishna said such people are like 'He who is dead as it were when alive, that is to say, as desireless as a corpse, becomes competent for Brahma-jnanam'. On those who have not achieved annihilation, Knowledge leave the impression of a Universe of beings, bodies, affairs and phenomena..... It is here in this sense, heart is the most comprehensive and nearest to the human reality, otherwise heart is the nodal point of transformation through which all the units of creation and creativity breaks and an unison is achieved with the supreme Unity or Reality, either in and through love or Knowledge.

Further, about extinction (Squeezing):"Ingersoll once said to me," said the Swami in the course of a class talk, :'I believe in making the most out of this world, in squeezing the orange dry, because this world is all we are sure of.' I replied, 'I know a better way to squeeze the orange of this world than you do; and I get more out of it. I know I cannot die, so I am not in a hurry. I know that there is no fear, so I enjoy the squeezing. I have no duty, no bondage of wife and children and property; and so I can love all men and women. Everyone is God to me. Think of the joy of loving han as God! Squeeze your orange this way and get ten thousand old more out of it. Get every single drop!"

- Life Of Swami Vivekananda pg. 327-328.

This Note was prepared roughly from the information contained in the Appendix and Glossary of the book titled, MASTERS OF WISDOM OF CENTRAL ASIA', by Hasan Shushud and published by Coombe Springs Press, London (1983). The book was kindly presented to me by Mr. Alberto D. Formai of Milano, Italy for which I am very thankful to him. Here I have referred very briefly only to few of the Sufi Masters whose concepts come close to Advaita Philosophy.



A Swan or Bird!

Saint Francis and others: "entered the city. The farmers were returning from the work: the sun was about to set. We seated ourselves in the garden of a ruine church......there was greenery and blossoms everywhere. Francis looker around him and sighed deeply: "Paradise must be just like this.......Do not see anything more. This is enough for the soul of man, enough and more that enough." Hearing much chriping above him he looked up. A flock of sparrow was flying towards the plane tree; there they had their nests and they were going home to spend the night. They perched on the branches, then scattered throughout the garden and began to peep happily before burrowing into their tin house to lay their heads upon their downy breasts and give themselves to sleer Francis advanced slowly towards them and held out his hands to greet them "Stay where you are, Brother Leo...... Since I haven't any grain to throw then I shall feed them with the word of God so that they may hear it and be able to go to heaven.

"Sister Birds, God the Father of birds and men, loves you greatly, and you are aware of this. That is why when you drink water you lift you tiny heads to have after each sip and give thanks to Him; why in the morning when the sun strike your little breasts you fill yourselves with song and fly from branch to branc alorifying HIS name, the name of the Lord, who sends the sun, and green tree and song. And you fly high up into the sky so that you can come close to HIM and He can hear you. And when your nests are filled with eggs and you ar mothers sitting on them to hatch them, God becomes a male bird, sits Himse down on the branch opposite and sings to ease your labors.: SAINT FRANCI by Nikos Kazantzakis.



*The Vedas speak of the homa bird; It lives high in the sky and there it lays if egg. As soon as the egg is laid it begins to fall: but it is so high up that it continue to fall for many days. As it falls it hatches and the chick falls. As the chick fall its eyes open: it grows wings. As soon as its eyes are opened, it realises that is falling and will be dashed to pieces on touching the earth. Then it at one shoots up towards the mother bird high in the sky." (GOSPEL OF SRI RAMA) RISHNA).



